

Special Educators' Experiences of Change Through Inclusive Education:
The Development of the Inclusion Continuum of Change

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Abstract

This phenomenological case study explored the change experiences of special education teachers who have transitioned from teaching in self-contained classes to inclusive class settings. Ten educators completed surveys and participated in a focus group. Of the original ten, five chose to participate in individual interviews. Descriptive statistics and focus group themes indicated that all ten of these educators had experienced shifts in their pedagogy and their overall beliefs and teaching methods for students with exceptionalities in inclusive classrooms. Data collected from the five individual interviews was combined using a descriptive phenomenological method, to create a single collective description that illustrated the change experience of special education teachers from segregated education for students with exceptionalities to inclusive education settings.

The overall findings indicated that despite their special education training, these educators were challenged by their own beliefs and expectations, the attitudes of others and systematic barriers in the education system. They were equally surprised by the academic and social performance of students with exceptionalities in inclusive classes, as well as, the growth and development of the other students, and the overall pedagogical shifts they recognized in themselves. These findings suggest implications for professional development and training with special education teachers for inclusive practice. As well, opportunities to maximize the skills of these educators in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and in mentorship opportunities within their schools where they serve as experts working with their colleagues is recommended.

Consideration is also given to how these implications affect all educators as schools become more inclusive environments.

From examining the literature on inclusion and teacher change and the findings of this research, a graphic representation titled *The Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change* was developed to illustrate the change experience of these special educators. This figure can provide special educators with a framework for which to map their own change experience. Further research to establish whether this graphic representation applies to all educators in inclusive settings is needed.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Literature clearly indicates that educators across the globe are shifting their perceptions and practices regarding students with exceptionalities due to school board and ministry mandates towards inclusive education (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma & Earl, 2009; Gibbs, 2007; Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2012; Sharma, Lorman, & Forlin, 2012). Classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse and the needs of students supported in inclusive classrooms are greater. Because of the changing needs of students, classroom teachers are no longer general educators, but, special educators.

Since the Salamanca Report (1994), systems of education all over the world have been called to adopt more inclusive approaches to education. This report is based on the premise that neighbourhood schools should accommodate all children despite disability (UNESCO, 1994). In 1994, 92 nations from around the globe met in Salamanca, Spain, along with the United Nations, and agreed to adopt and uphold this report in their countries to ensure that all children around the world have access to education that is inclusive. With this focus in mind, inclusive education entails students with exceptionalities learning alongside their same age peers in classrooms in their local schools. Inclusion is not students with exceptionalities sitting at the back of the class working with an Educational Assistant (EA) all day long. When students are fully included they are contributing to class discussions, accessing the curriculum and interacting with their peers on a daily basis.

Across the province of Ontario, what inclusion looks like from class to class and school to school looks very different, where a continuum of service delivery still exists, often based on the needs of the students. On the opposite end of the continuum of

inclusive education, segregated special education classes are specifically designed for students with particular learning needs. Segregated special education classes or self-contained classes involve specialized teachers delivering specialized programming and curriculum to students with a variety of learning needs outside those which are deemed to be suitable for a 'regular' class. How we define 'regular' may vary from person to person or school board to school board; however, 'regular' always regards students with identified exceptional learning needs as not part of the 'regular'. As we move towards less differentiation between 'regular' and special, we meet somewhere in between where students with exceptionalities have increased access to 'regular' and educators and policy makers realize that special isn't as necessary as was once thought to be. Perhaps one day inclusive education will just be 'regular'.

Yet, despite the recommendations from Salamanca, recent data reports that across Ontario, at least one third of students with exceptionalities, or over 50,000 students, spend at least half of their day in special education classrooms (Brown, Newton, Parekh, & Zaretsky, 2013). When we consider what inclusion means according to Salamanca, questions are raised as to why students with exceptionalities continue to be excluded despite special education policies based on a human rights framework. The answer is simple, yet complicated. Society has created structures that are innately exclusive. According to Martha Minow (1991), difference is created as long as we have something or someone to compare it to. The concept of difference and categorizing items and people based on a trait such as ability is deeply embedded in our schemas. Minow (1991) points out that we teach children to compare difference from an early age and in order to change the way adults and society view difference as being something less than

themselves, these schemas need to be altered. This concept of change is foundational for this research and will be further elaborated on throughout the dissertation.

This first chapter is an introduction to the research problem, rationale and purpose of this study, theoretical framework, guiding research questions, definition of terms, and an overview of the remainder of this document.

Problem Statement

According to Sharma, et al., (2012), school boards, administrators, and teachers recognize that creating truly inclusive schools requires change in traditional and common practices. Many classroom teachers understand that implementing fully inclusive practices can have a profound impact on their role in the classroom and to address the diversity of abilities in the classroom, teachers must adjust teaching styles including how they program for, plan, and execute curriculum (Forlin, 2001; Reiser & Secretariat, 2012). Literature on educators' perceptions reports that in order for educators to successfully meet the diverse needs of their students, they require favourable attitudes towards inclusive education as well as, adequate knowledge, thorough training and specific skills (Berry, 2011; Ivey & Reinke, 2002; Male, 2011). Teachers' attitudes and willingness to include students with diverse abilities, combined with their perceived confidence or sense of efficacy in being able to work with these students, are factors in determining the success of inclusion (Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Richardson, 1998).

Boer, de, Pijl, & Minnaert's (2011), comprehensive literature review found that across the 26 studies examined, most teachers did not rate themselves as competent to teach students with exceptionalities. Furthermore, when considering including students with exceptionalities on a full-time basis in their classrooms, teachers held neutral or

negative attitudes. Mukhopadhyay (2014) reported that teachers who have had special education training or professional development combined with direct experience teaching students with exceptionalities seem to be the most accepting and thus the most inclusive teachers, even when they have less teaching experience. Research also indicates that when school systems and administrators provide teachers with opportunities to reflect on their practice, the outcome can include changes in not only their behaviour but also in the rationale that accompanies new inclusive practice (Evans, 1996; Pyhältö et al., 2012; Richardson, 1998).

To move toward more fully inclusive classrooms and schools, the deeply embedded beliefs held by educators must be considered. When these beliefs do not align with the proponents of inclusive education then they must move in a direction of change, otherwise inclusion will fail (Pyhältö et al., 2012). Providing educators with the opportunity to examine their embedded belief system, can help them to recognize and better understand societal factors that influence their beliefs (Minow, 1991). When teachers have authentic experiences, where students with exceptionalities have positive academic and social gains, and engage in the process of reflective practice, their perceptions about inclusive practice can be altered positively. Furthermore, authentic experience, such as the opportunity to see and practice inclusion where students with exceptionalities experience success, enables educators to discover the challenges and successes of having a student with exceptionalities in an inclusive classroom. In combination with positive experiences and reflection, the examination of beliefs will help teachers to experience a positive change in attitude and perception about inclusion (Evans, 1996; Forlin et al., 2009; Loreman, 2007).

In examining the literature on teacher change and inclusive pedagogy, there is notably limited research that specifically delves into the change experience of educators regarding inclusive pedagogy. Inclusive pedagogy can be understood as the belief in and practice of inclusive education where including students is an embedded belief and is at the heart of classroom development and curriculum delivery.

Through examining the current literature, pedagogical change is identified. Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2008), considered change to inclusion from the role of the administrator, and others have discussed teacher change in general (Maskit, 2011, Pyhältö et al., 2012; Richardson, 1998). When change experience is understood by teachers and administrators, appropriate support can be better implemented (Male, 2011). In relation to inclusive pedagogical change, we understand that in order for teachers to have a true change in beliefs and perceptions, it is necessary for them to have direct high-quality interactions with students who have exceptionalities (Forlin & Loreman, 2009; Sharma et al., 2012). These high-quality interactions involve teachers being involved in the positive social and academic gains of students with exceptionalities in inclusive classrooms.

Richardson (1998) discussed a view described by Gallagher, Goudvis, and Pearson (1988) termed "mutual adaptation" where teachers systematically and thoughtfully approached their own change process. It was suggested that mutual adaptation might be the best methodology when attempting to evoke dramatic change—such as shifts in orientations and beliefs—regarding the inclusion of students with exceptionalities (Richardson, 1998). Although current research on teacher change examines external factors involved in this process (Gibbs, 2007; Mukhopadhyay, 2014;

Pyhältö et. al, 2012); there is little to support the idea of teachers having opportunities to engage in a reflective process of change, where they consider their pedagogy and make changes based on their learning (Kgothule, & Hay, 2013; Pyhältö et al., 2012). All students will benefit when teachers are provided insight into the steps necessary to experience authentic pedagogical change towards making classrooms inclusive.

Educators who understand that change is a process can use this knowledge to inform their practices and facilitate authentic inclusive experiences, where educators and all of their students experience success.

Research Purpose

Since the establishment of *The Education Amendment Act* commonly referred to as *Bill 82* in 1980, Special Education has been a ministry mandated policy for practice across Ontario. From school board to school board, these policies vary slightly, however; they all maintain the underlying concept that it is the responsibility of school boards to provide an education for students with disabilities. What this policy looks like in practice may consist of students with exceptionalities attending special education classes for a portion or their entire school day; being integrated into non-specialized classes for a portion or their entire school day; being included in all aspects of the school day with their peers with and without disabilities; or any combination of these options. In my professional practice, I have worked for and with several Ontario school boards in a special education context. It is clear to me that despite well-intentioned opportunities for students with exceptionalities, the current school board policies are not conducive to truly inclusive education. The idea that students with exceptionalities are included in *all* aspects of the school day in classrooms with their peers, with opportunities for academic

and social growth with a real sense of belonging and access to social capital is not always the reality in the current education system. These challenges to inclusion I have witnessed over the course of my own teaching career, as well as the opportunity to witness and experience successful inclusion have raised questions as to why sometimes inclusion meets the needs of students with exceptionalities in schools and at other times it does not. What are teachers doing to create classrooms where inclusion promotes belonging? It was the intention of the current study to examine this idea of inclusion as belonging and how through one school board's policy implementation, some educators experienced a change in pedagogy.

A mid-sized Ontario school board has been engaging in an overall change in service delivery of special education services over the past three years. Based on proponents from the Learning for All document presented by the Ministry of Education in 2009, this school board initiated a change in the ways in which students with exceptionalities were accessing education. By eliminating self-contained special education classes across and redistributing special education services and personnel, school board leaders are attempting to create a system that is inclusive to all learners, regardless of ability. School board leaders felt that this was the first step to creating a more inclusive school board. Using special education dollars to develop creative ways to support teachers and students through this transition was a key element to the overarching plan.

A change in service delivery requires educators to adjust their pedagogy. Data collected, in another study, from educators in this same school board indicated that in general teachers at the elementary level were more likely than secondary teachers to

inclusive classrooms (Bennett & Gallagher, 2015). Secondary teachers still favoured instruction that was geared towards keeping students focused, whereas elementary teachers identified higher ranking in measures that involved adjusting student learning goals, finding activities that interested students and arranging accommodations for students (Bennett & Gallagher, 2015). Although educators in this board have identified preferred strategies at elementary and secondary, most educators identified including students as challenging, which is consistent with the literature.

From these findings, one could identify that for many educators in this board the pedagogy they have been practicing will need to be self- evaluated in order to move forward with this change in service delivery for students with exceptionalities. A subset group of teachers, those who have previously taught in self-contained special education classes, have identified concerns with their changing role. They face moving into regular classrooms after many years of teaching in self-contained classes and their prior views and beliefs about educating students with exceptionalities may be challenged.

As previously indicated, research on teacher change indicates that educators will experience change in attitudes and beliefs towards including students with exceptionalities when they have training and expertise combined with authentic opportunities to participate in inclusive practice (Evans, 1996; Mukhopadhyay, 2014). When provided with training and experiences with inclusive practices, educators will adjust their teaching practice, the overall strategies they use, and the climate they establish in their classrooms (Evans, 1996; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Mukhopadhyay, 2014). In witnessing student with exceptionalities demonstrate academic and/or social success in their classroom, educators will adjust their pedagogy accordingly.

With a specific focus on special education teachers, although they have prior training and expertise to work with students with exceptionalities, their opportunity for experiencing successful inclusive practice is limited based on their work in special education classrooms which are segregated from others. In recognition that change of any sort is a process, this research investigated the process of change that has occurred and continues to occur in special educator attitudes and teaching practice at the end of the second year of a board-wide implementation aimed at increasing inclusive practice. These teachers had the experience of moving within the last five years, from teaching a self-contained class to an inclusive class, where students with exceptionalities would access curriculum and social opportunities with peers without exceptionalities, either as part of the overall school-board plan or by their choice.

The aim of the current study was to describe the personal experience of former self-contained special education classroom teachers working through inclusive pedagogy with a focus on whether their challenges and successes have contributed to a shift in their beliefs and attitudes. By sharing the personal stories of former self-contained special education classroom teachers, this work gives a voice to the unique change experience of these educators. The research findings contribute to identifying factors involved in the change process of former self-contained special education classroom teachers involved in a change process of inclusive pedagogy for students with exceptionalities.

Research Questions

In order to better understand the change experiences of these special education teachers, The following questions were explored: (a) What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive

classes? (b) How has this change in classroom placement impacted their attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices? Using a questionnaire, a focus group and personal interviews, data was gathered to answer these questions.

Personal Connections or Grounding

When I consider what inclusion means in my own teaching practice and theoretical understanding, I think about my own experiences and how they have shaped my ideals. I have come to understand inclusion as being about creating a classroom environment that facilitates all students' access to social and academic opportunities, that fully meet their learning needs and challenge them to explore their strengths. For me, this concept was developed over years of teaching in various settings and perhaps began to formulate early on in my own schooling experiences. As a young student myself, I was in an education system that excluded children with exceptionalities from having access to curriculum and social experiences. Those students from my elementary school became students in secondary school who were further denied access to the opportunities afforded to their peers without disabilities. At that time, this practice was "normal" and unquestioned. Although this was my early experience, which in turn, shaped my perceptions, I have come to view this practice of "normal" as something very different.

I began my work life in an attempt to "help" or "fix" children with exceptionalities, working as a support worker and camp coordinator. I found this work very personally satisfying and rewarding and did not question how society had structured my rose-coloured perception of the work I was doing. Because of my interest and experiences working with children with exceptionalities, when I began teaching I was

offered a position in a self-contained special education class, which I gladly accepted. I did this work for eight years before considering the different alternatives of what it would look like to have my students included in classrooms with their peers and what they would get out of it. As I think back, I can recognize that my change experience was not an epiphany but involved many layers of thinking and adjusting practice, challenging my beliefs and moving forward.

My opportunity to have an authentic experience of successfully including a student with an exceptionality came just after my move out of self-contained classes. If my life circumstances did not require me to change jobs I may not have moved beyond where I was at as a self-contained class teacher. When I was teaching a grade five class for the first time, I had a student identified with global developmental delay in my class. I decided that it was most important for him to be in the class all day and the educational assistant (EA) and I would work out the details of his involvement. Over the course of that year, I had critical conversations that challenged me to consider my current inclusive pedagogy. Were my practices genuine inclusion? How could I better foster this student's sense of belonging in our class? As a former educator of self-contained classes I worked through my own beliefs about special education and my perceptions about what inclusion was. I came to an understanding about what defines inclusion. Inclusion is not simply a child with exceptionalities occupying space in the classroom; rather, inclusion is developing a sense of belonging for all students in the classroom through an increased awareness of individual needs. What follows is part of how I came to question my current practices.

Before moving into an inclusive classroom, I had spent eight years teaching self-contained special education classes. My perception of inclusion based on these experiences was founded mostly on the concerns of how a regular classroom would provide the level of learning and confidence that I had witnessed in my students in the contained class setting. This is partly because I often received feedback from parents that their child had been so much more successful both socially and academically in the self-contained class; but, also because I witnessed the building of friendships between students as well as the development of positive work habits. Students who were deemed 'unable to function' in a regular classroom due to behaviours and significant learning needs, were now completing tasks based on curriculum expectations and interacting positively with each other and other students in the school. For some time, I attributed the success of my students, accomplishing tasks, achieving curriculum and alternative expectations and showing a desire to come to school and learn, as a direct result of the contained class environment. I felt that the contained class was a place where the students had the opportunity to grow and thrive socially and academically, which I did not see happening in mainstream classes where students with disabilities were included on a full-time basis. What I saw in mainstream classes, were students being removed from the classroom for long periods of time during the school day, students spending recess segregated from their peers in an alternative learning environment, and when they were in the classroom they were working at the back of the room one on one with the EA. I struggled to understand the positive outcome of this type of inclusion. As such, I felt that the self-contained class, although not without its' flaws, was the better of the two choices for students with exceptionalities.

I held this belief for many years as I failed to see examples of ‘good’ inclusion happening in the schools in which I worked. When I was challenged to reconsider my perception of inclusion in the Grade 5 classroom, I drew from my former experiences to shape what I felt inclusion should and could look like in an elementary school classroom. The turning point in my change process was the opportunity to witness firsthand the successful inclusion of this student and to work through the process of developing an inclusive pedagogy. Over the course of the school year, I worked with my grade five students and the EA to develop ways to ensure that the student with the most significant exceptionalities was included in our class. Through teaching the students about human rights and belonging, I relied on them to help ensure inclusion was happening. It was through the creation of an inclusive classroom community that I witnessed a transformation of the overall perceptions and experiences of all my students. The opportunity to see the results of this collaboration and change in the students impacted my perception of what it means to be an inclusive class and an inclusive educator. In observing all the students in the class to reach a sense of autonomy and belonging, my attitudes and perceptions about inclusion were transformed. I was called to re-evaluate my position in the classroom, the school, and the education system itself.

To understand how my beliefs were shifting, how to deliver a program that provides each student the opportunity to feel safe, important, and respectful of each other’s strengths and weaknesses, I realized that getting to a point where inclusive practice is part of a teacher’s pedagogy, requires that teacher to consider many factors. Inclusion, which at the time seemed natural and easy for me to do, was not easy for some of my colleagues. I began to consider how all my experiences contributed to shaping my

pedagogy and realized that the way I practiced inclusion in my classroom was a result of years of experiences and training. My perceptions began to change as my experiences changed. This realization of how my background had shaped my role in the classroom led me to consider how other educators came to their inclusive pedagogies. Motivated by my personal experience, this research contributes to the establishment of some guidelines as to how a process of change for educator beliefs about inclusion occurs. Finally, a deeper understanding of how inclusive pedagogy is developed by learning from the change experiences of other special education teachers is sought.

Outline of the Remainder of the Thesis

In the following chapter, I provide a review of the theoretical framework and literature review. A focus on critical theory, specifically critical disability theory, and children's rights will be discussed as they relate to the inclusion of children with exceptionalities in schools and communities. Chapter 2 also provides a literature review of teacher perception and teacher change. In Chapter 3, the quantitative and qualitative research methods selected for this study, as well as the rationales for these methods, are described in detail. Specifically, the participant and site selection, procedure, data gathering, recording, and analysis are outlined. Chapter 3 also articulates the ethical guidelines followed to indicate how the participants in this study have been protected as well as the study's limitations. Chapter 4 presents the research findings of the study. Chapter 5 discusses the research finding of this study and connects them to past work and theory. Also, a description of *The Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change* is presented. Finally, Chapter 6 outlines the implications for all those involved in education as they work together to understand, evaluate, and incorporate inclusive

practices. How special educators have experienced this change in service delivery and what future actions can support educators who are going through a similar change experience will be discussed. Directions for future research and conclusions are also stated in this final chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The current study was designed to investigate the change experiences of educators moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to a model of fully inclusive education. More specifically, the researcher examined the experiences of ten educators in an attempt to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes? (2) How has this change in classroom placement impacted their attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices? The study was informed by a careful review of literature relating to critical theory, inclusive education, teacher perception and teacher change. This chapter presents a review of the contextual and innate components involved in teacher change as it relates to inclusive education. The following section describes the theoretical framework used to situate this study.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This research is rooted in critical theory, specifically critical disability theory and change theory, as it relates to teacher change and inclusive pedagogy. Critical theory is concerned with normative values such as democracy, fairness, and equity. It considers how social factors such as, socio-cultural, socio-economic, ethno-cultural and ethno-race, hold the same responsibility as legal and physical factors which combined, restrict us from realizing change within systems. When we consider fairness in terms of all people having the same level of access to the same services and we consider how often this is not the reality for many people, we recognize society as being unfair or unjust in many ways. In reality, access is only granted fully to a small portion of the larger community. Critical

theory on the other hand, identifies the notion of justice as a means of promoting the right to access for marginalized people. As such, critical theory was developed to explain what is wrong, who can change it, and what kind of change is needed (Horkheimer, 1972). It is the way in which systems are structured which limits or prevents full access and participation by some groups. When all people living in a community can access a service freely, without barriers then they have full access. Full access can be created by changing the structures that exist which prevent full participation (Burghardt, 2011).

In examining critical theory, a new understanding of how critical disability theory defines a politicized view of “the meaning and treatment of disablement in Canadian society as a whole,” became evident to me, namely in Canadian school systems (Rioux & Valentine, 2006; p. 48). Minow’s (1991), seminal work describes how legal rules, based on classifying difference, really consider the perspective of the rule or policy maker, rather than the objective reality of the individuals. And, when we have policy that describes difference, it gives permission to exclude, to classify and to discriminate (Minow, 1991). As such, the problem lies deeper than the structures that prevent access such as buildings or policies or language. The way in which individuals with disabilities have been treated over time has created patterns of discrimination and inequity, which remain entrenched in our belief systems (Rioux & Valentine, 2006). These realities are evident in the structures of many social organizations including school systems, which will continue to be explored throughout this dissertation.

There are two common mindsets for considering one’s view of disability, charity-based and rights-based. A charity-based model has been a common model for inclusion of individuals with exceptionalities where the disability is viewed as a problem within the

individual that cannot be fixed (Burghart, 2011; Clapton & Fitzgerald, 1997; Lawson, 2006; Quinn, 2009). According to this model, individuals with disabilities ‘need’ medical support in order to access society and the notion that society has a moral obligation to help ‘these’ people is the belief that is adopted. Within this sort of mindset, society focuses on the difference of individuals, which prevents him/her from ‘fitting in’ (Burghart, 2011; Clapton & Fitzgerald, 1997; Lawson, 2006; Quinn, 2009). A charity-based mindset for educators is evident when educators identify that inclusion is a good thing to do for children with disabilities. This charity-based mindset involves educators ‘doing their best’ to help the child with a disability to get through the day. From a charity-based lens, a successful day is when the child has been well taken care of physically, has some learning experience and, on occasion, can participate in some of the activities that the rest of the class is doing.

Although many individuals and educators may hold charity-based beliefs, over the past few decades a growing interest in an extension to the charity model has emerged (Harpur, 2012; Rioux & Valentine, 2006). The human rights approach, or rights-based model, identifies that for individuals with exceptionalities, the problems that exist are a result of the structures and systems that society has put in place (Harpur, 2012). When an individual with an exceptionality cannot access a service, it is due of a system that is exclusive, which must change in order to allow access of all people regardless of a disability (CRPD, 2007; Harpur, 2012). Minow (1991) offers a ‘social-relations’ explanation to this dilemma, where individuals are only different when they are compared to one another. Society is governed by a set of rules which decide what is ‘normal’ or different from ‘normal’. Therefore, a human rights perspective on disability challenges

the language and policies that create and uphold the barriers to access for people with disabilities. This perspective also suggests that changes in attitudes and practice are essential for equitable experience for individuals with disabilities. Educators have a valuable role in the approach they take when considering difference and disability; and, recognizing and changing their pedagogy to better align with a human rights perspective.

Changing pedagogy encompasses a vast body of literature which concludes that educators require opportunities to not only collaborate with each other but also to have authentic positive experiences with that which is to change (Evans, 1996; Forlin, 2001; Porter, 2010; Richardson, 2008; Vaughn & Schrumm, 1995). When considering changing from a segregated to a fully inclusive pedagogy, positive experiences including students with exceptionalities, where students experience real opportunities for social and academic success directly related to teaching practice, paired with collaboration prove to be successful. Most educators have positive views of inclusive practice, yet do not feel competent to initiate inclusive practice for students with disabilities in their classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Boer, de, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

A rights-based model of inclusion takes the position that each child regardless of ability has a right to participate fully in all aspects of school including being in a classroom with their peers and participating in extracurricular activities (CRPD, 2007, Harpur, 2012; Lawson, 2006; Stein, 2007). Individuals with disabilities are complete human beings with the same rights as able bodied people and systems (such as schools) need to ensure that all rights are respected. Porter (2010) contends that school systems (and educators within them) need to change to adopt this model of inclusion based on the

human rights as outlined by UNESCO in 1994. Opportunities to challenge beliefs, regarding students with exceptionalities, from a rights-based model of inclusion, may provide educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in an authentic inclusion experience, where all students have a sense of value and belonging at school.

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, developed a document outlining the specific rights of people with disabilities to align with the current basic human rights for all (CRPD, 2007). Before this document people with disabilities did not have the same access globally to many basic human rights. The CRPD (2007) maintains a holistic approach that ensures that individuals can flourish and participate in their societies. Stein (2007) posits that fully including people with disabilities based on a rights framework, requires petitioning both negative rights (preventing harm) and positive rights (promoting rights/changing practice). When we fail to counteract the unequal position of people with disabilities in society as a whole - including schools, we perpetuate social stigma and all of the attitudes that sustain the exclusion of people with disabilities (Stein, 2007). Harpur (2012) identifies that a rights-based framework creates a new discourse where human rights are more obtainable for persons with disabilities, more so now than any other time in history.

With the support of CRPD (2007) and UNESCO (1994), a rights-based framework for inclusion of students with exceptionalities within a given school district focuses on students having access to all services and school experiences because it is their right as a human being. When educators have a rights-based perception about including students with disabilities in their classrooms, students with disabilities are treated as the other children and educators teach to their individual learning needs

because it is understood to be their job. School systems and teachers believe that a student with a disability has the same rights as all other students to access the program and to reach his/her learning potential. Based on the premise of rights-based inclusion, it is the responsibility of the school to ensure the student has supports needed (e.g., equipment, EA support, technology, etc.). It is also the responsibility of educators to ensure the student has access to a program derived from the curriculum that meets the cognitive needs of the student and matches what the other students in the class are doing appropriate to their age.

According to a recent Ontario Ministry of Education document, *Learning for All*, developed out of 10 years of data to support school boards across the province, all students learn best when instruction, resources, and the learning environment are well suited to their particular strengths, interests, needs, and stage of readiness (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Although this *Learning for All* concept has been adopted by many boards of education, following a model of rights-based education continues to be a work-in-progress (Porter, 2010).

From a critical lens, according to Katsui and Kumpuvuori (2008), “charity-based approaches fail to empower people with disabilities to make their own decisions about their own lives and to achieve ownership of their selves.” (p. 229) As we move forward in the education system, it is critical for educators to flush out their pre-conceived notions about their beliefs about charity based inclusion, as only with a rights-based framework for inclusion will authentic inclusive classrooms be developed. Rooted in critical theory, developing a critical reflective knowledge considers change of these critical phenomena and invites research to evaluate how one goes about change (Horkheimer, 1972).

Literature Review

As we examine how teachers' beliefs influence their pedagogy, we can begin to understand how change happens for educators in their practice and move forward, challenging perceptions and breaking down barriers that remain obstacles for creating inclusive learning environments for all students in all schools. Kgothule and Hay (2013) attest that in order for inclusion to be systematically and competently implemented, the views of school principals and teachers regarding inclusive practices must be established and developed; which is not a simple task. Despite reporting positive views of inclusive education as an idea, educators identified the practical implementation of inclusion to be problematic for their teaching practice (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Although teachers perceived inclusion to have benefits for students with exceptionalities, including the development of independence and socialization skills, and many educators do in fact support inclusion, Mukhopadhyay (2014) reported that overall teachers had a negative attitude towards inclusion of students with exceptionalities in their classrooms.

In practicality, regardless of teacher belief or intent, administrative support and policy shift are key to any change movement in education. Over the past several decades, support and policy have had significant impacts on the inclusion of students with exceptionalities, imposing changes in program development and implementation.

Background on Inclusive Education

UNESCO (1994) describes inclusive education as a way of acknowledging and programming for the diverse needs of all students by allowing for full participation in the education system and in the community. UNESCO's statement indicates that in order for

successful inclusive practice to occur, curriculum, teaching approaches, and strategies need to change. Inclusive education involves changes in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision that encompasses the needs of all children. Specifically, in relation to the curriculum, educators must consider what content is to be taught and learned, how is this content to be taught and why is this content and skill important, in relation to meeting the needs of all the learners in the class. The successful inclusive classroom functions in a way that is accessible to all learners physically, academically and socio-emotionally.

It is based on these premise, that many school boards have developed inclusive policies and continue to work towards implementing inclusive practices that meet the needs of all learners by ensuring their participation in the classroom and the school (Reiser & Secretariat, 2012; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012). Inclusive education can be described as a place where all students are challenged at an appropriate level within the context of having access to opportunities for enhanced social capital. Within the constructs of traditional education systems this generally means students with exceptionalities in grade appropriate classrooms with their same age peers in their local schools. Students with disabilities go to the same schools as their siblings, have the same learning opportunities, and are engaged in the academic and social activities of the classroom, just as the other children. Porter (2010) further explains that schools which are inclusive support both students with disabilities, and also their teachers to accomplish individual goals that are meaningful.

Educators and administrators understand inclusion to be about how environments can be created so that all students can be successful, regardless of their perceived ability

(Porter, 2010). Giangreco, Cloninger, Dennis, and Edelman, (1994) initially proposed that inclusive classrooms should demonstrate five characteristics: heterogeneous grouping, a sense of belonging, shared activities with individualized outcomes, use of environments frequented by people without disabilities, and a balanced educational experience. Bennett (2009) further defines belonging as an understanding that moves beyond the idea of ‘including’ students with disabilities in the classroom, to a deeper sense of value and appreciation as a part of a group. Belonging then, encompasses more than physical inclusion. Belonging challenges environments, in this case a classroom and a school, to facilitate how all students can feel supported and cared for by each other including their teachers. Belonging happens when inclusion becomes so ingrained that it no longer exists as a separate entity or practice. In an ideal reality, belonging is the foundation of inclusion and practice contrary to this would barely be a memory.

Although there are many visions of what inclusive education should entail, the message is consistent: students of all abilities should have equal opportunities in their classrooms and schools as well as a sense of belonging and the potential to succeed. Embedded practices contrary to this ideal prevent the creation of inclusive classrooms for all students regardless of exceptionality (Sharma et al., 2012). Yet, questions remain as to how educators get to the point where they accept, understand and practice inclusive education where *all* students have a sense of belonging? Furthermore, how do school boards prepare and support educators as they strive to foster this ‘rich’ sense of inclusion?

As we examine how teachers’ beliefs influence their pedagogy, we can begin to understand how change happens for educators in their practice. With this knowledge, we

can challenge perceptions and break down barriers that are obstacles to creating an inclusive learning environment for all students in all schools. Although many educators perceive inclusion to have benefits for students with exceptionalities, including the development of independence and socialization skills, Mukhopadhyay (2014) reported that overall, teachers had negative attitudes toward the inclusion of students with exceptionalities in their classrooms. Male (2011) and Leyser, Zeiger, and Romi (2011) found that there was an overall shift in attitudes toward inclusion after engaging in teacher training on exceptionalities. Teacher reports indicated that assumptions and beliefs about inclusion were challenged, and thus, their pedagogy and practices were altered (Leyser et al. 2011; Male, 2011). Through the development of their autonomy, teachers became more confident in their decision-making ability, felt empowered, and took responsibility for implementing inclusive practice in their own classrooms (Richardson, 1998). Similar studies found that in order for teachers to have a true change in beliefs and perceptions, it is necessary for them to have direct, high-quality interactions with students who have exceptionalities (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma, & Earle, 2009; Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012).

Many educators are open and willing to attempt to develop inclusive classroom and school environments. They question however, *what* skills are necessary to implement inclusive practices, and *how* assessment can take place, particularly when only an adequate level of competency is obtained (Sharma et al., 2012). The main barriers to creating inclusive classrooms as identified by educators include: not having appropriate preparation and support in special education, classroom management problems, a disconnect with collaboration between general and special educators, and teachers'

perception of a lack of appropriate resources and support to create successful inclusion (Bennett & Gallagher, 2016; Vaughn & Schrumm, 1995). Classroom teachers recognize that implementing fully inclusive practices impacts their role in the classroom. To address the diversity of abilities in the classroom teachers must adjust teaching styles including how they program for, plan, and execute curriculum (Forlin, 2001; Reiser & Secretariat, 2012). Most research on implementing inclusive practices indicates that in order for teachers to be effective and ensure each student is successful, ongoing professional development and support from administration and experts in the field are required (Bennett, 2009; Forlin, 2001; Porter, 2010; Vaughn & Schrumm, 1995).

Teacher Attitudes Regarding Inclusion

As the number of students with exceptionalities attending local schools continues to increase, classrooms will become increasingly diverse, challenging educators to re-evaluate their perceptions and ideals and adjust their pedagogy (Berry, 2011; Mukhopadhyay, 2014). The development of perceptions and attitudes begins with one's early experiences. Educators' experiences with inclusion of people with disabilities as elementary and secondary school students themselves, impacts the beliefs and attitudes they hold as adults. As educators working in school systems, their perceptions on inclusion is also influenced greatly by the realities and expectations of the school administrator and the school board. Given that school board and ministry policy regarding the inclusion of students with exceptionalities mandates inclusive practice to be implemented in the classroom, attitudes about students with exceptionalities are particularly relevant especially when teacher attitudes are negative (Male, 2011). As such, educators each carry with them a set of beliefs, perceptions and expectations about

inclusion that guides their practice each day. Allan (2012) suggests accepting that there is not a one size fits all answer or magic solution for inclusion, is an important step for educators towards progress in developing inclusive practice.

A significant body of research indicates that globally, educators' positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with exceptionalities are critical to successfully create an inclusive classroom. In order for educators to successfully meet the diverse needs of their students, literature supports educators requiring adequate knowledge, thorough training and skills, as well as favourable attitudes towards inclusive education (Berry, 2011; Ivey & Reinke, 2002; Male, 2011). Teachers' attitudes and willingness to include students with diverse abilities combined with their perceived confidence or sense of efficacy in being able to work with these students, are factors in determining the success of inclusion (Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Richardson, 1998). In similar studies on efficacy, teachers indicated that they were more confident and could successfully teach while including students with exceptionalities in their classes once they obtained knowledge and skills (Leyser et al., 2011).

A literature review focusing on teacher attitudes regarding the inclusion of students with exceptionalities found that overall teachers possessed a neutral or negative attitude toward inclusion of students with exceptionalities in their classrooms (Boer et al., 2011). Boer et al. (2011) found that in the 26 studies examined, from 1998-2008, most teachers did not rate themselves as competent to teach students with exceptionalities. Furthermore, they cited several studies that showed teachers with one to five years of teaching experience held significantly more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs when compared with teachers who possessed six or more

years of experience. In comparison to years of experience teaching, Boer et. al (2011) reported that teachers who had experience and training with students with exceptionalities held more positive attitudes towards inclusion compared to those colleagues who did not have training or experience. Literature also supports the notion that as years of experience increase, positive attitudes decrease (Alghazo & Naggar Gaad, 2004; Glaubman & Lifshitz , 2001).

Mukhopadhyay's (2014) framework for stages of professional development for educators categorizes educators based on their beliefs about professional development and changing practice. Findings indicate that teachers who were in the first half of their careers were more willing to engage in pedagogical change when compared to those in the last half of their career, especially in the years before retirement (Boer et al., 2011; Mukhopadhyay, 2014). Teachers have also identified that specific preparation and support was a critical prerequisite to effectively implement inclusion in their classrooms (Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Leyser & Romi, 2011). As in other studies, teachers expressed feeling underequipped with the knowledge and teaching experience necessary in order to decide whether they could effectively implement inclusion (Kgothule & Hay, 2013; Male, 2011). While MacFarlane & Woolfson (2013) found similar results they concluded that teachers who had more training, held positive views of inclusion and teachers with more experience were less likely to hold positive views on including children with exceptionalities. These findings allude to the importance of the appropriate preparation and ongoing support including opportunities for authentic experiences in order to help teachers facilitate inclusive classrooms.

It is evident in the literature that educators require knowledge, training, and skills, combined with favourable attitudes towards inclusive education and self-confidence in teaching ability in order to create successful inclusive classrooms (Berry, 2011; Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Ivey & Reinke, 2002; Male, 2011; Richardson, 1998). In similar studies on teacher efficacy, teachers indicated that they were more confident and could successfully teach while including students with exceptionalities in their classes once they obtained the requisite knowledge and skills (Leyser et al., 2011).

Although a few studies have found that special education teachers have more favourable attitudes about the abilities of student with exceptionalities and towards inclusion, these studies focus on special education teachers who are working as a support to classroom teachers rather than teaching in their own inclusive classrooms (Bean, Hamilton & Zigmond, 1994; Woolfson, Grand & Campell, 2007). Studies focusing specifically on teachers' perceptions and experiences of inclusion are limited whether teaching in a contained or an inclusive class. These studies consider special education teachers to be teachers who support all students with exceptionalities within a school or teaching in a self-contained special education class. In a recent international study of special education teachers' and classroom teachers' beliefs about mainstreaming (a term sometimes used to describe an inclusive model), Bekirogullari, Soy Turk, and Gulsen, (2011) found that contradictions existed among the responses given by special education teachers. Regarding inclusion of students with exceptionalities, some special education teachers argued that students with exceptionalities should only be included during the subjects that promote play skills, while others said they believed children with exceptionalities are capable of achieving by observing the behaviour of children without

disabilities (Bekirogullari et al., 2011). Overall, Bekirogullari et al. (2011) found that among special educators from the United States and Cyprus, there is little knowledge about the methods and content of inclusive education. As experiences are a factor in attitudinal change, special education teachers require opportunities to develop and practice their own inclusive classrooms in order to compare their outcomes, attitudes, and beliefs with classroom teachers without special education experience.

Given that most teachers in general do not feel adequately prepared to teach students with exceptionalities, Boer et al. (2011) also cited several studies that showed teachers with one to five years of teaching experience held significantly more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with special needs when compared with teachers who possessed six or more years of experience. This finding may be due to the school experience and teacher preparation program of the newer educators which may have a stronger focus on inclusion. These experiences that are more inclusive can be linked to school board policies and practices in special education. In comparison to years of experience teaching, Boer et. al (2011) reported that teachers who had experience and training with students with exceptionalities held more positive attitudes compared to teachers who did not have training or experience. The idea that positive attitudes decline as years of teaching experience increases has been supported in other literature (Alghazo et al., 2004; Glaubman & Lifshitz, 2001).

Canadians, Jordan and McGhie-Richmond (2010) examined the relationship between elementary general education teachers' beliefs about disability, their roles in inclusive classrooms, and how these variables were related to teaching practices. Their findings indicated that 25% of the teachers interviewed held 'pathognomonic' beliefs,

whereby “disability is an internal, fixed, and pathological condition of the individual that is not amenable to instruction” (p. 262). Teachers who held these beliefs, focused on the label of the disability as the explanation for the student’s underachievement, and thus believed that students with disabilities were the source of their own learning difficulties. On the other hand, teachers with ‘interventionist’ beliefs viewed disability as “created in part by a society that is designed for the able, and that creates barriers for those who have disabilities” (p. 262). Jordan and McGhie-Richmond (2010) found that only 20% of the teachers held interventionist beliefs and also viewed creating access to learning opportunities by use of accommodations and work as their responsibility. The remaining teachers, approximately 55%, held beliefs that fell somewhere along the continuum between both pathognomonic and interventionist beliefs.

Independent of the terms used to describe teacher beliefs, from the literature examined, it can be concluded that in general teachers’ perceptions about disabilities (whether positive or negative, or somewhere in between) influenced their attitudes about including students with disabilities in regular classrooms. Although there are structural factors including teacher preparation, professional development, and support which can influence teacher ability to implement inclusion; attitudes and beliefs of disability and inclusion were the most confounding factors in the previously discussed literature.

One could conjecture that the more positive attitudes held by newer teachers are indicative of their lived experiences regarding students with disabilities in classrooms. These teachers are in a position where they have lived through the beginning stages of the inclusion movement as students themselves in the era of the Salamanca Report (1994). In Ontario, Bill 82 was passed in 1980 as an amendment to the Education Act, simply

stating that school boards were required to be accountable for the education of students with disabilities. Since 1980 special education in Ontario has taken on many forms. Initially most service delivery for students with exceptionalities was segregated. As of 1994, more efforts have been made across the province to implement more inclusive forms of educating students with exceptionalities. Teachers who were educated pre-inclusion may not have had the level of exposure to children with exceptionalities as novice and younger teachers. The early experiences of educators are important to consider when examining the influence of attitudes and beliefs on inclusion. As our experiences, both as students and educators shape our beliefs and attitudes over time, the process of how a change in attitudes and beliefs are deeply connected to pedagogy warrants further examination.

Teacher Change Process

The process of change as experienced by educators is a phenomenon in which researchers have attempted to understand, in order to program for professional development (Richardson, 2008; Maskit, 2011). In a long-term collaborative study of teacher change, (Richardson, 1994) found that when a teacher tries new activities, s/he informally evaluates the activities based on several factors to determine effectiveness, such as whether activities fit within his/her set of beliefs about teaching and learning, and whether the activities engage the students while maintaining his/her desired degree of classroom control. It was concluded that if the teacher felt the activity did not work based on the previous criteria, it would be quickly abandoned or changed completely (Richardson, 1994). More recently, Maskit (2011) found that educators responded to implementing change, in different ways, depending on the stage of their career. Teachers

in the beginning and middle stages of their careers viewed change more positively, whereas, teachers at the end of their careers viewed change more negatively (Maskit, 2011). Along with positive attitude toward change, teachers at the beginning of their careers were more actively involved in the number of attempts to implement changes in the classroom and may see the implementation of change as an inseparable part of their profession (Maskit, 2011).

Literature on teacher change and school change consistently indicates the essential support of school administration in creating a culture that embodies the change (Miles, 1998; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). Similarly, Jordan and McGhie-Richmond (2010) found that teachers' beliefs were highly influenced by the culture and ethos of the school. The authors concluded that researchers need to understand the beliefs as socially contextualized by the views of the school as a whole, rather than from a personal viewpoint, when interpreting the beliefs of others (Jordan & McGhie-Richmond, 2010). Mukhopadhyay (2014) reports that teachers who have had training and direct experience with students with exceptionalities seem to be the most accepting and thus the most inclusive educators, even when they have less teaching experience. It is important to consider from a school culture perspective that this newer teacher is the one most likely to have the least influence within the school regarding change. Initially discussed by Evans (1996), Gibbs (2007) proposes that to effect change in teacher beliefs about inclusion, there needs to be an interaction between teacher perception of personal self-efficacy and the overall efficacy within the school building.

A teacher has readiness for change to occur when they can balance autonomy with community (Evans, 1996; Gibbs, 2007). The ideal is a community of practice (the

school) where educators engage with each other in critical discussions regarding pedagogy and practice and encourage one another to be inquirers in this setting (Kruse, Louis & Bryk, 1995). Schools as communities of practice require many levels beyond educators engaging in critical discussions. Administrators and school boards can support this process by providing opportunities for educators to engage in discussions and reflections. A Professional Learning Community (PLC) provides opportunities for educators to engage with each other in innovative ways of thinking and reasoning as well as developing new forms of interacting (Kruse et al., 1995). In a longitudinal study of teachers in China, Tam (2015) found that teachers experienced a dramatic change in belief and practice about collaborating with each other and increased the collective capacity of working in groups. Five areas of teacher change were uncovered including, curriculum, teaching, student learning, roles of teacher, and learning to teach (Tam, 2015). PLCs can be one tool used in schools to support educators through changes in beliefs regarding practices for inclusion for students with exceptionalities.

Evans (1996) describes the hierarchal structure of schools and school systems as the main challenge faced by schools or boards facilitating change where teachers need to be supported to develop their autonomy within a community of learners. Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2008) further discuss the importance of the commitment of school administrators to articulate a vision of the philosophy and practice of the inclusive education they hope to achieve in their schools. The challenge of having all levels 'buy in' is crucial in fostering this learning community and thus cannot be a top down or bottom up process: all members must have ownership during the change process.

In further examining how one undergoes a change in perception, Pyhältö, Pietarinen, and Soini (2012) explained an interrelatedness in the way educators perceived a change and their place within the change. Teachers often resisted change mandated or suggested by others, yet; research shows that teachers participated in voluntary change which was self-initiated or self-directed (Richardson, 1998). Richardson (1998) believes teacher change is most successful when it is executed in a way that promotes teacher involvement in the process, and encourages coherence among teachers within the school or district. In explaining the sensitive nature of teacher change process, Richardson (1998) refers to Morimoto's (1973) view on change process;

When change is advocated or demanded by another person, we feel threatened, defensive, and perhaps rushed. We are then without the freedom and the time to understand and to affirm the new learning as something desirable, and as something of our own choosing. Pressure to change, without an opportunity for exploration and choice, seldom results in experiences of joy and excitement in learning. (p. 255)

Pyhältö et al. (2012) found that those who perceive themselves as active change agents possess a holistic and functional perception of the change. Jordan and McGhie-Richmond (2010) also found that the overall school environment has a significant influence on teachers' beliefs and their views about their own roles and responsibilities within the school structure. It is evident from the literature that the teacher change process is not without its' challenges. Identifying the necessary supports in the process of change is important for moving forward with school change specifically regarding inclusion.

The perceptions and roles of educators in this process of change to inclusion, must be considered.

Changing Attitudes

Many constructed beliefs about disability and special education are rooted in historical understandings of disability. Changing educators' attitudes and beliefs with regard to inclusion and disability can be a challenge; even more so when the attitudes and beliefs have been embedded in one's belief system for most of his/her life. Teachers are often not aware of the assumptions, theories, or educational beliefs they hold (Carrington, 1999). According to Carrington (1999), a teacher may adopt components of a stance that seem 'right' to them at some point in their career perhaps because they match the expectation of others, such as colleagues who they admire or with whom they affiliate.

Within this understanding of belief development, a teacher's pedagogy exists at two levels: that which they say they believe and intend (their espoused theory) and those assumptions, beliefs, and intents one can infer from their behaviour (their theory in use) (Carrington, 1999). This implies a conflict may exist at any given time where a teacher's beliefs do not align with how his/her behaviour is perceived by others. Carrington (1999) concluded that it is not until one's espoused theory of action matches one's theory in use that one's beliefs can be considered in alignment. When considering this early work of Carrington (1999) and Maskit's (2011) previously discussed work on teacher change, one might conclude that given the many external factors (including teaching experiences, training, prior life experiences and administrative support), changing attitudes is deeply rooted in a combination of all of these factors along with one's personal beliefs.

Research also suggests that in order to challenge and change their beliefs, teachers need the opportunity to actively engage and experience success in using inclusive practices in their classrooms and only then will they experience a positive change in attitude and perception about inclusion (Evans, 1996; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009). Richardson (1998) discussed a view described by Gallagher, Goudvis, and Pearson (1988) termed "mutual adaptation," where teachers systematically and thoughtfully approached their own change process. It was suggested that mutual adaptation might be the best methodology when attempting to evoke dramatic change (such as shifts in orientations and beliefs) regarding inclusion of students with exceptionalities (Richardson, 1998). This being said, it is also important for educators to be given opportunities to engage in a change process and guidance from colleagues and specialists as they work through questions that arise from their personal reflection. As active change agents, educators develop a holistic and functional perception of the change they are participating in and can then identify what changes should occur (Pyhältö, et al., 2012).

The Impact of Teacher Change on Inclusion

Connections can be made between teacher attitudes about students with exceptionalities and teacher change and this can be applied to teacher perceptions regarding including students with exceptionalities in classrooms. According to Richardson (1998), it is necessary for teachers to create a sense of autonomy that goes beyond their classroom for the students they teach. When educators and schools think globally about inclusion, they have a better understanding of how their efforts to create an inclusive classroom can have an impact on the overall inclusion of students within the school, the program, and the community (Richardson, 1998). To do this, the

responsibility cannot solely be that of the educators. Schools and school systems need to also be accountable for this change process by fostering change of the attitudes that the school and school system impose (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008; Richardson, 1998).

In Male's (2011) study of teachers enrolled in a Master's programme in Special and Inclusive Education in the UK, there was an overall attitudinal shift for all four categories of inclusion (physical, social academic and behavioural). At the end of the course the educators indicated more favourable attitudes towards the inclusion of students with physical/sensory exceptionalities, social, academic and behaviour exceptionalities. Although all categories of exceptionality showed a significant increase in favourable attitudes from the beginning to the end of the course, it is notable that for social and academic exceptionalities, the mean score at the end of the program was the highest score of six, meaning the most favourable attitudes towards this group of students. While still an increase in favourable attitudes, albeit to a lesser degree, the mean score for behaviour exceptionalities was four out of six (Male, 2011).

These findings suggest that the educators possessed more positive attitudes overall at the end of the course, compared to the beginning of the course. For this group of teachers, the process of change that occurred by being enrolled in this professional development course was a positive shift in attitude related to inclusion of students with exceptionalities (Male, 2011). Teacher reports in this study indicated that assumptions and beliefs about inclusion were challenged, and as a result, their pedagogy and practice altered.

Leyser et al. (2011) similarly found a significant effect when examining the degree of exceptionality training that teachers engaged in, and the teachers' self-efficacy with respect to being able to implement successful inclusive practices in their classrooms. Teachers developed a change orientation that led them to reflect continually on their teaching and classrooms, and experiment thoughtfully with new practices. Through the development of their autonomy, the educators in these studies became more confident in their decision-making ability, felt empowered, and took responsibility for implementing inclusive practice in their own classrooms (Richardson, 1998). Similar studies found that in order for teachers to have a true change in beliefs and perceptions, it is necessary for them to have direct high quality interactions, where they are programming for and recognizing student social and academic success with students who have exceptionalities (Forlin, et al., 2009; Sharma et al., 2012). Finally, in order to challenge personal assumptions about individuals with disabilities, student teachers (and classroom teachers) needed to be provided with the time and opportunity to develop relationships with individuals with disabilities (Forlin, et al., 2009; Sharma, et al., 2012).

Chapter Summary

In accordance with UNESCO's vision of inclusive schools for students with exceptionalities, schools fundamentally must consist of educators who hold positive beliefs and are committed to including students with exceptionalities in their classrooms. The research presented in this review of literature suggests the importance of educators having an authentic hands-on experience including students with exceptionalities in order to fully appreciate the benefits of inclusion; however, there is little research on how teachers with special education training and experience engage in and make sense of what

inclusive practice is. This phenomenological case study (Fees, Hoover and Zheng, 2014) will be an attempt to capture the experiences of special educators as they work through a change in their teaching practice from segregation to inclusion.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research methodology used in this study. Specifically, the participant and site selection, procedure, data gathering, recording, and analysis are presented. Chapter 3 also outlines the ethical guidelines followed to ensure that the participants have been protected as well as the limitations of this study. Chapter 4 presents the research findings of the study. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings and finally Chapter 6 outlines the implications for all those involved in education as they work together to understand, evaluate, and incorporate inclusive practices. A focus on how special educators have experienced this change in service delivery and what actions moving forward can support and enhance educators with a similar experience. Directions for future research and conclusions are also stated within this final chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This chapter describes the methodological considerations and research design of this study. These procedures were used to address the following research questions: (1) What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes? (2) What has been the impact of this change in classroom placement on teachers' attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices? The participant and site selection, data collection and analysis, methodological assumptions, and ethical considerations are also detailed in this chapter. Following this, the chapter presents the steps that were taken to establish credibility and enhance the quality of the data gathered in this study and, also the limitations.

Research Design and Methods

A phenomenological case study was conducted using qualitative data collected from personal interviews, a focus group, and a short participant questionnaire (Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 2009). To understand more completely the process of change as experienced by the participants and develop their stories, these various data were collected over a period of three to four months. The first data collection took place in June 2015, and consisted of a 27-item inclusion questionnaire and a focus group of ten educators who had all taught in a self-contained class for one year or more and had recently (in the past 5 years) transitioned to an inclusive classroom setting. These participants were asked to contribute further through an interview which occurred between August and October 2015. Of the initial 10, five participated in the interview component. Following data collection, the five interview participants were contacted one

final time in order to member check their interview account and further contribute or omit any information.

Based on the criteria of phenomenological case study, this research gathered several forms of data that were collected over two or more occasions in order to capture rich and robust information. Case study data collection requires triangulation which in this study was the three different data collection methods, focus group, questionnaire and interview (Yin, 2009). Phenomenological interviews normally consist of three different interviews; background and context, structure of experience and details, and reflection (Seidman, 2013). In this study, the questionnaire and focus group were designed to establish and gather background information about their general perceptions of inclusion as well as set a context for the nature of change within their experience which is the focus of the first research question. The personal interview gathered more in depth details related to the experiences (first research question) as well as allowed for reflection of each educator's place within the change, namely the *turning point* - which was the focus of the second research question.

The methodology described includes both phenomenology and case study methods in order to capture the lived experiences of the teachers as they have moved through the time in their career where their role has changed from special education teacher to inclusive teacher. According to Reeder (1986) phenomenology is a “self-critical methodology for reflexively examining and describing the lived evidence (the phenomena) which provides a crucial link in our philosophical understanding of the world” (p.1). Originating from the work of Husserl in the 1800's, phenomenology is based on the beliefs that information which is subjective, such as the personal accounts of

the special education teachers, is important for understanding what motivates human behaviour (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Reader, 1986). Since human actions are influenced by what people perceive to be real, people do not engage in critically reflecting on their own experiences. Thus, Husserl developed the phenomenological approach as a method to bring out the essential components of the lived experiences specific to a group of people, in this case, the special education teachers.

Another assumption underlying Husserl's approach to the study of human consciousness is that there are features to any lived experience that are common to all persons who have the experience (Lopez and Willis, 2004). Giorgi (2009) adapted Husserl's approach from that of a philosophical method to a psychological method where he describes the Descriptive Phenomenological Method. This approach was utilized to provide the lived experiences of the special education teachers who were interviewed, focusing on their perspectives without the use of deception and allowed the researcher to maintain the voice of the educators (Giorgi, 2009). It is on these premises of phenomenological methods as a way to hear, retell, and reflect upon the lived experiences (change from segregated practice to inclusive practice for students with exceptionalities) of the special education teachers, in combination with case study methods outlined below, where an overall essence of this lived experience was explored.

Case study research involves specific and in depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon (i.e., teacher change) and the boundaries that exist between this phenomenon and real- world contexts (i.e., attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and teacher training), and based on theoretical frameworks and multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). Crabtree and Miller (1999) describe case study research as a means for

participants to tell their story based on a close collaboration developed between the researcher and themselves. Researchers aim to develop a trusting environment where participants can describe their views of a situation/phenomenon allowing the researcher to develop an understanding of the participants' actions (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Fees, et al. (2014) conducted a phenomenological case study where they examined the current perceptions of educational philosophies and practices of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in China and subsequently what these teachers perceived their international colleagues should understand about the current state of ECE in China. Through focus groups, this study gathered information about teachers' perceptions of changes in ECE and their challenges with the implementation of current policy in China. Through the ECE's descriptions of their classrooms and teaching practice, Fees et al. (2014) were able to gather a sense of how these educators were implementing current educational philosophy and their perceptions of success and challenges in their current roles. Similar to the work of Fees et al. (2014), by combining the methods of phenomenology and case study, I was able to capture and share the experiences of the special education teachers as well as consider the potential relationship that these experiences have with attitudes, belief systems and pedagogy in their current role as inclusive educators.

In phenomenological research, the researcher presents to the participant as someone who reports having also lived the phenomenon under investigation (Englander, 2012). Moustakas (1994) attests that the self of the researcher is present throughout the entire research process including collection and analysis of the data. Although I attempted to use bracketing in order to separate my own ideas, preconceptions and

knowledge when collecting and reflecting on these lived experiences, it is unrealistic to presume that my perceptions and experiences did not become a part of the analysis and discussion of the findings (Giorgi, 2012). It is understood, in phenomenological research, that the researcher's own interpretation of the phenomenon will influence the analysis of the data and the development of the descriptions (Giorgi, 2012).

Data Collection

In this research, participants were invited to share their story of an ongoing experience (the change from teaching segregated to teaching inclusive). Participants met two specific criteria. Firstly, the participant must have been a special education teacher in a self-contained class prior to the study and secondly, each participant must also have moved to teach in an inclusive classroom within the past five years. As in case study research, there was a small $n = 10$ participants for the survey and focus group and five of which agreed to participate further in the interview, where an in depth and holistic analysis of perception and experience is described (Yin, 2009). Of the 10 participants, nine were female and one was male, with a range in years of overall experience from 10-20 years and self-contained class experience of three to 10 years. At the time of the data collection, five were teaching in primary/junior divisions (K-6) and five were teaching in intermediate/ senior divisions (7-12). All participants were from one Ontario school board undergoing a shift in service delivery for students with exceptionalities from a self-contained special education model to an inclusive model, in order to meet the needs of students with exceptionalities. Educators were invited to participate in a short questionnaire, a focus group, and an interview via a platform of their choice (written responses, face to face interview, or Skype).

Englander (2012) describes the benefit of having a preliminary meeting with the participants as an opportunity to establish trust, review ethical considerations and complete consent forms. This initial meeting in this research also involved some of data collection including a questionnaire and a focus group. This method aided the researcher in obtaining a richer description during the final interview without needing to ask preliminary questions. According to Giorgi (2009), the goal of interview data collection involves the participants' opportunity to self-interpret how the experience with the phenomenon had affected their lives.

Participants were invited by the researcher via email to voluntarily attend a workshop day involving the opportunity to participate in the research study. Upon distribution and completion of the letter of information and consent, participants were also asked to complete a 27-item rating scale developed by the larger research team to gather information on current perceptions of and experiences with inclusion (Appendix A). This scale helped to triangulate the data as it covers similar topics around perceptions of the inclusion model and developing and practicing inclusion in the classroom. The questionnaire gathered some general background information for the educators which will help to provide additional detail on the overall thoughts on inclusive practice of the participants individually and as a group. The 27 questions asked consisted of background information including years teaching in both self-contained classes and inclusive classes, their views on the impact of inclusion on students, and their personal view of their role in teaching an inclusive class.

On the same occasion, a focus group took place in an attempt to generate discussion on topics related to the similar experiences of the teachers while at the same

time provide these educators with the opportunity to engage with like-minded individuals on topics related to inclusive practice. The ten teachers along with the researcher met for approximately one hour, where specific questions were asked in order to facilitate discussion (Appendix B). Teachers were assigned a corresponding number which was used in data analysis to sort responses. The focus group was audio recorded and participants were asked to state their number before responding to a question or engaging in the discussion. This experience was designed to be a space to begin a discussion about their individual change experience by addressing background topics about their teaching experience in general, their perception of teacher change, in general, and their overall perceptions about the inclusion of students with exceptionalities. The questions were purposefully asked in order to elicit a conversation and provide an opportunity for the teachers to think about their own personal change experience by discussing teacher change in general. Common themes were found throughout each method of data collection in order to ensure a most complete depiction of the teachers' experiences (Yin, 2009).

According to Yin (2009), interview questions are targeted and insightful and focus directly on the topics covered by the case study. As in a phenomenological case study, participants were asked questions which encouraged them to reflect and describe implications of their experience (Flaton, 2006). According to Englander (2012) research questions should focus on discovering the meaning of a phenomenon and follow an interview format beginning with asking participants to describe their experience within the phenomenon, in this case inclusion. Participants were first asked to describe their experience with inclusion in their teaching practice, which relates to the first research

question: What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes? Subsequent interview questions focused on the participants' interpretations of their experience which answered the second research question: How has this change in classroom placement impacted their attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices? The general open-ended nature of the interview questions, for example, "please describe your experiences of including students with exceptionalities", allowed participants to identify what they believe their experience to be (Broome, 2011). Follow up questions included asking participants to tell more about something they had spoken only briefly about. For complete interview questions, see Appendix C.

The main interview questions for each teacher were identical and followed the same format, prompting them to reflect on their personal journey in their teaching career, over the past few years. To maintain as much consistency as possible, probing questions were used minimally; usually to ask, "can you tell me more about that?". The option to select interview or writing was provided in order to recognize the time constraints of teachers. To eliminate the weakness of inaccurate recall and response bias (Yin, 2009), the opportunity to write responses to interview questions allowed teachers the opportunity to complete them at their leisure and also have time to think about the answers they provided. In order to provide several formats to meet the individual needs and preferences of the participants, interviews took place via Skype or over the telephone and written responses were completed electronically. Giorgi (2009) described written responses to be a suitable and more concise alternative to interviews in phenomenological research. The following table provides a summary of the data collection and analysis.

Table 1

Timeline of Data Collection (DC) and Analysis

May 2015	Invitation email/Letter of Invitation
June 2015	DC1 The Inclusion Rating Scale
June 2015	DC2 Focus Group
August-September 2015	DC3 Individual Interviews/Written Responses
October –December 2015	Transcribe Focus Group, Interviews, Run Descriptive Statistics from Inclusion Rating Scale
January 2016	Member checking

Data Analysis

The raw descriptions provided by the participants during focus groups and interviews were recorded for later transcription. A digital voice recorder was used to capture the focus group and interview contents and I transcribed both the focus groups and interviews into text for further analysis. It was the transcribed text that was used as the raw data for analysis. As part of the data collection process, all identifying information that would have revealed the participants' and other people's identities, places or things that could make such identities easily known were replaced with pseudonyms or other fictitious representations as are appropriate to maintain the privacy of those interested parties. Due to the small and unique group of participants it was important to ensure that shared experiences were altered in a way to protect their identities as well as the authenticity of the story.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were compiled with the data collected from the initial demographic survey instrument using Microsoft Excel software to provide background and descriptive information about similarities and differences in the teachers' answers regarding their views of inclusion. Answers were compared in order to examine similarities and differences in responses. Once results were presented in an Excel spreadsheet, I tabulated the results of each question by hand as there were only ten surveys to examine. The questions were then categorized into three groups based on common themes.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The focus group transcripts were analyzed in order to identify data that addressed the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The ‘constant comparison method’ (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used to code the data from the transcripts and group the codes into categories and themes (Lichtman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 2002). NVivo software was used to obtain information and assist in developing codes and as a tool to organize data; however, the raw data was sorted individually in order to ensure accuracy that the intended meaning related to the category used for coding. As in open coding procedure, codes were assigned to relevant ideas to reduce the data and to aid comparison of similarities and differences in overall experiences of the teachers. Codes were then grouped into categories (Lichtman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 2002).

The next step in analyzing the data was to examine the five educator interviews in order for it to be compiled into one collective description using Giorgi’s (2009), descriptive phenomenological method. Phenomenological analysis, termed phenomenological reduction, according to Giorgi (2012) was used to develop each educator’s description. To get a sense of the whole, the researcher first read the entire description of each participant. As previously stated, each case description was developed one at a time. The second step was to go back to the beginning of the description and reread it looking for key moments in order to group parts of the description. Giorgi (2012) explains that creating meaning units, as described previously, simply aids in the analysis and are based solely on the attitudes of the researcher. The third step involved the transformation of the data into expressions to make explicit what

the participant has said in relation to the phenomenon being studied. Once the most direct and more sensitive expressions related to the phenomenon were reviewed, the description is written. Finally, the remaining description is then used to help clarify and interpret the raw data of the research including the data collected from the focus group and the survey. For the purpose of this dissertation, the description will be presented in Chapter 4 along with text boxes of participant voices which were interpreted in the development of Jamie, a single representative participant, in order to provide the reader with context for the description.

Ethical Considerations and Methodological Limitations

Research Ethics Board clearance from Brock University and the School Board were attained as amendments to the original Brock REB that was granted for the larger research project (REB # 13-042-BENNETT) and the research clearance from the school board. The amendments included the addition of approaching former self-contained class teachers as participants for this research.

There are several methodological limitations to be considered. Teachers may have felt obligated to participate as the research is supported by the school board for which they were currently working. Researching topics related to personal beliefs and experiences can be sensitive in nature and may lead teachers to feel that they are being judged. I took every precaution to uphold anonymity with data attained through interviews, writing, and the focus group. All potentially identifying information was omitted from the raw data as per my judgement and by request of the participants. I clearly iterated the intentions of the research to giving a voice to their stories.

By being forthcoming with my own experience with shift in beliefs about inclusion, I attempted to help the teachers to be comfortable sharing their own experiences. It was clearly stated in the letter of information and consent form of their right to withdraw from the study at any point and that they did not need to answer questions if they were not comfortable. It was also clearly stated that the stories they share are recognized as confidential. Publications and dissemination will not be linked to the school board in any way and will not contain any identifying information about the participants personally. Participants were provided with the opportunity to member check their own story in order to ensure my interpretations accurately portrayed their experiences.

There are several factors which impact the reliability of this study. The constriction of teacher time is a factor that may have contributed to the response rate and quality of responses provided by the participants. Teachers voluntarily participated in the data collection based on their personal interest and involvement with the school board transition. Although 10 teachers for the focus group participated as part of a professional development opportunity, they had to give their time to be a part of the study. The five teachers that provided interviews or written responses did so on their own time, over the summer break. Although this is an uncontrollable factor in phenomenological interviewing, the quality and differentiation of voice could be a limitation in that some participants were willing to give more time and contribute more information than others.

This group of participants meets the criteria for phenomenological case study research; yet, this small, unique sample make generalizability difficult. A question that arises is whether or not these findings apply to other self-contained class teachers in other

school boards across the province. It can only be speculated based on the findings and literature presented here that similarities and overlap would be found if this study was replicated with a different group of educators with the same criteria of having moved from teaching a self-contained special education class to an inclusive class within the past five years. Another factor involves the specialized nature of the group of educators invited to participate. Since all of the teachers were former self-contained class teachers from one school board, these findings can only be attributed to other teachers with similar degrees of experience in special education from a similar school board.

Because our experiences shape our perceptions, each individual will engage in this data on a slightly different level. Although Giorgi (2009) discusses this issue in relation to being a benefit to descriptive phenomenological analysis, it is also noted as a limitation in this study. Even though the transcripts were read by a neutral researcher for confirmability of selected themes (Shenton, 2004), and transcripts were member checked by the participants, my experiences as an educator with my individual journey of inclusion, have influenced my perception of the data as it has been presented. For this reason, the findings are expressed from my perspective as the researcher. Although I attempted to bracket my own bias, when there is interpretation of data by any researcher, especially in phenomenological description, it is unrealistic to conclude that my schema as an educator did not influence the interpretation of data.

Chapter Summary

This study utilized three data collection methods: survey, focus group and interview, to collect descriptive statistics and qualitative data based on case study and phenomenological ideologies. Based on the methods discussed, Chapter 4 presents the

research findings of the study. Chapter 5 presents a discussion and makes connections of the findings. Finally, chapter 6 provides a synthesis of how educators, administrators and policy makers move forward in creating inclusive classrooms and schools.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

To investigate the process of change experienced by special education teachers as they move from self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes this study focuses on two questions: (1) What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes? (2) What has been the impact of this change in classroom placement on teachers' attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices?

While collecting data, the later question was often addressed first because asking about general experiences and attitudes and perceptions provided a platform to discuss the deeper topic of change. Although the change was identified as a result of their experiences, attitudes and perceptions, one's ability to identify their own change is a personal process of self-discovery and I had no way of knowing prior if they were even aware of the change they may have experienced. Generally, educators enjoy talking about their teaching experiences and their ideas about various topics. The information that was shared was valuable in allowing me to get a sense of each teacher's beliefs. This part of the discussion also served as an icebreaker for the educators to talk about their experiences of change.

The survey data obtained provided background information about the educators' experiences with, and attitudes and perceptions about inclusion. As a group, this data gave a general sense of where these individuals were at currently in relation to how they look at inclusion in their schools and in their classrooms. As such, this data set focused on the second above-mentioned research question. Descriptive statistics highlight the similarities and differences of the educators' perceptions.

The focus group data was analyzed using the constant comparison method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) in order to develop themes in which both research questions can be addressed. These data provided a broader discussion to support the description developed from the interview and information gathered from the survey. The interview data were analyzed and compiled to create one single representational description using Giorgi's (2009), phenomenological description. This description answered both questions with more of a focus on the first research question.

Descriptive Statistics of Survey Data

The survey was used in this study to collect background information and gauge the overall perceptions of the educators regarding inclusion at this point in their change process. The following results are descriptive in nature based on the questionnaire responses of the ten educators. The results were tallied, compared and reported in three categories: questions related to personal experience and perception of inclusion, questions related to effects of inclusion on students and questions regarding factors involved in successful inclusion. Table 2 provides each question according to the category or theme and the total number of selected responses for each question.

Table 2

Data Collected from the Survey by Question and Category

Question much	No, not at all	Somewhat	Yes, very
Questions related to personal experience and perception of inclusion.			
Q1 In an inclusive class, I anticipated that dealing with students with special needs would be challenging.	0	8	2
Q2 I feel prepared to work in an Inclusive class.	0	5	5
Q3 I am confident in my ability to work with students with exceptionalities in an inclusive classroom setting.	0	3	7
Q4 I am more knowledgeable about differentiating curriculum.	0	3	7
Q5 My view of inclusion has become more positive.	0	2	8
Q6 I am more confident in my ability to support inclusion next year.	0	2	8
Q7 Teaching in an inclusive setting has increased my workload.	2	4	4
Q21 Prior to this experience I would have said that I was a strong supporter of inclusion.	1	3	6
Questions related to effects of inclusion on students.			
Q8 Students with exceptionalities in my class have shown academic growth.	0	6	4
Q9 Students with exceptionalities in my class have shown social growth.	0	2	8
Q15 The students in my class have been positively affected socially by the inclusion of children with special needs.	0	1	9

Q16 The students in my class have been positively affected academically by the inclusion of children with special needs	1	5	4
Q17 A service delivery model that focuses on inclusive practice provides more opportunity for students with special needs to achieve academically.	1	5	4
Q18 A service delivery model that focuses on inclusive practice provides more opportunity for students with special needs to achieve socially.	0	3	7
Q19 From my observation, students without exceptionalities are more engaged academically.	3	4	3
Q20 From my observations, students without exceptionalities are more engaged socially.	0	3	7
Questions related to supports for successful inclusion.			
Q10 It would be beneficial if I had more opportunity to collaborate with other teachers.	0	1	9
Q11 Support from administration is an essential part of successful inclusive practice.	0	0	10
Q12 Access to ongoing PD would be beneficial to supporting inclusive practice.	0	3	7
Q13 Inclusive practice requires more planning time	0	5	5
Q14 Support from an inclusion coach has been helpful in creating successful inclusive practice.	3	1	6

Questions Related to Personal Experience and Perception of Inclusion

When educators were asked if they anticipated that teaching students with special needs in an inclusive class would be challenging, all teachers felt it would be somewhat challenging or very challenging, yet, they similarly felt prepared as well as confident to teach students with exceptionalities. Although most educators felt that their workload had increased, and inclusive practice required more planning time at least somewhat, they also identified themselves as now holding a more positive view, being more knowledgeable about differentiating curriculum and being more confident to teach in an inclusive class next year. All but one educator indicated being at least somewhat of a strong supporter of inclusion before his/her transition, whereas all indicated at least a somewhat or more increase in their positive view of inclusion.

Questions Related to Effects of Inclusion on Students

Educators were asked if they felt students with and without exceptionalities in inclusive classrooms had shown academic and social growth. They indicated that students with exceptionalities showed at least some academic and social growth with almost all selecting 'very much' for social growth. As for students without exceptionalities, teachers felt that they equally had benefited socially from inclusion, with slightly less indicating students were positively affected academically. Most educators felt that an inclusion model provided more opportunity for students with exceptionalities to achieve academically, whereas; all educators indicated an inclusive model provides more opportunity for students with exceptionalities to achieve socially. Although the educators felt strongly that the students without exceptionalities were more engaged socially, they mostly felt that inclusion did not affect their academic engagement.

Questions Related to Supports for Successful Inclusion

When answering questions about supports, all educators identified that support from administration is ‘very much’ essential for the success of inclusion. Access to ongoing professional development, and having rich opportunities to collaborate with other teachers were both rated by most educators as very beneficial to them. Just over half of the educators identified support from an inclusion coach as being a least somewhat helpful.

Focus Group Themes

The data obtained from the focus group yielded four main themes. Due to the nature of phenomenological questioning where individuals were asked to describe their experiences, results indicate several factors that may have impacted the change process of the educators. These factors were gathered and grouped and finally transformed into the following four themes: support and training, attitudes and perceptions, inclusive practice and growth and change.

The second research question: What has been the impact of this change in classroom placement on teachers’ attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices? is addressed by three themes where the educators identified their experiences of **support and training, attitudes and perceptions, inclusive practice, as well as, growth and change**. In the first theme, **support and training**, the educators discussed support as it related to their experiences in both self-contained classes and inclusive classes. The second theme, **attitudes and perceptions**,

encompasses the attitudes and perceptions held by the educators as well as those attitudes and perceptions they experienced from others regarding the students with exceptionalities in their schools. The third theme, **inclusive practice**, considers both positive and negative experiences of inclusion, as well as the challenges and successes of what inclusion looked like in their classrooms. The first research question: What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes? is addressed by the final theme **growth and change** where the educators described their various experiences through thoughts, experiences and turning points thus identifying changes that have occurred in their pedagogy.

Support and Training

When the educators were asked what they felt was needed to support inclusion, they unanimously identified time and collaboration as the two key factors. Specifically, the teachers mentioned time to develop programs and resources so students with exceptionalities can be fully included in the curriculum as well as time to collaborate and build trusting relationships with other teachers. The following are examples of what they said:

“they need to recognize the extra time that is needed to make sure that programing meets that child’s needs and that it’s not just slapped together so that it can be parallel or equivalent to what everyone else is doing in that classroom so that it truly is an inclusive activity. But that time needs to be recognized. It can’t just be something assumed that the teacher will do every single night to make sure, whether your pecs are made or whether you have all your manipulatives set out. Because I don’t think our time is often included in what needs to go into the inclusion activities that will help that child.”

“time for teachers to peer coach so working together to try things in your class and to collaborate so that two teachers can have that time to develop that trusting relationship and working together to problem solve tricky situations that you are not going to problem solve alone that there is no right answer to go to.”

It is clear from these excerpts that although these teachers have experience and training in special education, they are identifying challenges of time and support as essential to their success in implementing inclusive classrooms. Although these teachers identified important supports for including students with exceptionalities, they still faced many additional challenges in relation to the attitudes and perceptions of others which will be the focus of the next section.

Attitude and Perception

Within the context of this study, attitude and perception encompass the way individuals think about inclusion. This is indicated by how and what people say and do in situations involving people with exceptionalities in relation to experiences and social norms. The educators gave examples of how they perceived the attitudes of others as well as exemplified their own attitudes and perceptions about inclusion. When the educators spoke about the attitudes and perceptions of others they identified the attitudes of their colleagues regarding including students as personally troubling and frustrating. The following are examples of what they said about the attitudes of others:

“something needs to be done to help teachers who have this wall and we need to find out why they have that wall, and why they are so against changing what they have done for years. I don’t know if that’s an admin, I don’t know if that’s the learning for all coaches,

I don't know if that's a kick somewhere, you know just to reiterate that this is a child.

You know, this is a child!"

"the naysayers speaking out about not wanting to have that student in their class, or complaining or laughing about situations in the staffroom."

One participant suggested reasons for why teachers may respond with negative attitudes towards inclusion, indicating that lack of understanding and sometimes fear may be contributing factors.

"I think a lot of that is rooted in lack of understanding of how to work with those students, or stress and pressure, or not feeling supported or not feeling like they have the skill set and that is sometimes how it is dealt with."

These teachers discussed how the negative attitudes, language and behaviours of their colleagues isolated them as special educators in their schools. They identified avoiding certain common areas of the school such as the staffroom and, they also noticed others avoiding them.

"Your lunch room is your most dangerous area of your whole school. It is. I can't even walk into the lunch room and sit down because I leave there aggravated. I literally leave there angry because I feel so frustrated with people and their comments."

"all naysayers then it's just that much worse and they will just bring everyone down, it just spreads like a virus."

“every fall when I would approach every teacher and ask for their schedule and it would be reluctantly handed to me. I would beg, literally beg teachers, can so and so come to your gym class? Yes I will send an EA.”

“the other students did not interact with my students but more importantly the teachers would do a wide berth, walking around them in the hall.”

These examples shed light on the isolation felt by these teachers in their workplace. The lack of inclusive community was evident to them and based on their job placement and the students that made up their classrooms, they were excluded based on the explicit and implicit behavior of their colleagues.

The educators also recognized that despite the negative attitudes they were receiving from their colleagues that their colleagues were also experiencing a similar change albeit to a lesser degree or at a different rate than they had. In the following excerpts, they identify important components of the change process including personal experiences which are positive, figuring things out for oneself and having conversations with colleagues.

“I think sometimes there are certain teachers now who want to do that [inclusion] and it’s hard to stand back and watch it but, I think it’s a process and that teacher needs to go through that process to realize, ‘oh yeah, maybe they do need to go out’ and it’s hard not to just go up and say ‘No, they should not be in that class’.”

“watching that teacher go through the learning process with that student was hard because you want to protect them, you want the best for them, you don’t always see them as having the right attitude or skills set for that student but they have to go through that

same learning process too and to have them in that environment with other people out there to have those discussions.”

“People’s minds change when they can see those kids and that they can learn and make friends and that things are ok.”

“Initially when we talked about inclusion...people thought it was a uniform fit, inclusion is for everybody and this is how it’s going to roll out and really I think as we have slowly moved into it we are getting a greater understanding of inclusion for one looks a lot different for one than inclusion for another”

These teachers discussed feeling challenged as they watched their colleagues work through the trials of including students with exceptionalities in their classrooms. They wanted to help their colleagues but recognized that it was a process that needed to be experienced. As each of them experienced success in their inclusive classrooms, they were confident that their colleagues would as well. The following theme inclusive practice presents examples of what they observed and experienced themselves and with their colleagues including students with exceptionalities in their classrooms.

Inclusive Practice

Inclusive practice encompasses both positive and negative examples of including students with exceptionalities into mainstream classes. The educators identified experiences they had both while teaching in self-contained classes as well as while teaching mainstream inclusive classes. Examples are from their own experiences as well as experiences they witnessed. Many educators identified that they saw positive inclusion based on the behaviour of the other students in the class. The reactions of the other students in the class and how they developed understanding and acceptance was an

indicator of successful inclusive practice for these educators. The following excerpts describe some of these inclusive practices:

“It wasn’t the reaction of the kid using the technology that was important but it was the reaction of the rest of the class who kind of perked up. It was the first chance they had to see this kid in the light of oh wow, he really has good thinking going on there. So that’s my first big one as a 5/6 teacher.”

“We were all lined up for our class picture and someone says ‘where is Michael? He’s not with us, we’ve got to get him for the picture’.”

“Stronger athletes or the regular students take over the teacher role and say ‘now remember, not in your mouth; watch me, this is how we do this’.”

The educators also identified an underlying element of surprise from their colleagues that students with exceptionalities were successful in the inclusive class. Students surpassed teacher expectations, and through inclusion, other teachers saw them as individuals not identified by characteristics of their disability.

“The following year where that classroom [special education class] was closed and they didn’t have a choice, those students were in their classrooms, the conversations I had with those teachers were completely different. They actually used their name and talked about positives as opposed to the unfortunate comments they would have made the year before because they didn’t know them as individuals.”

“That teacher was able to find an instrument that would work for every student. And the child that was in there actually surpassed all the goals he had set for her and that really stuck out and he was so impressed that he is excited to have her come back in his class

the next year and so he already knows he has that students for two music classes and is excited to see where she can grow.”

From these examples, students were challenged as well as teachers to create more inclusive classrooms and schools. As students with exceptionalities were being included into classes with their peers, peers and teachers alike were getting to know them on a personal level, based on their interests and skills sets rather than their disability. At this point, the teacher participants began to recognize and name their own growth and change process.

Growth and Change

The focus group question asked the educators to describe a turning point they could identify when they felt their thinking about inclusion was shifting. When the educators described their experiences and identified “turning points”, their years of experience did not appear to be a crucial factor in the change process. Rather, the type of experiences had by the educators was more indicative of the occurrence of a shift in thinking.

In some cases, the teachers were able to pinpoint their “turning point” to a specific event. For others, they attributed a series of events occurring over a period of time while in a particular situation or role. The following examples describe teachers’ experience of change as spanning over a period of time where they noticed one day that their view was different based on the teaching practices which had slowly changed to meet the changing needs of the students in their classes.

“I am not going to say *ah-ha* moment; I am just going to say validation. Every year, pretty much around February, you are in gym class and you have every ability in there

and you start to see some of the stronger athletes or the regular students take over the teacher role and say, 'now remember, not in your mouth; watch me, this is how we do this' ... So it's not an ah ha, just a validation that this is right."

"I can think of several milestones in my career where things shifted, pivotal moments where I was like 'ya!', when I saw it in the classroom."

"I had Friday socials, and I would invite different classes and we would play games and have treats and I just wanted them [the kids from the regular classes] to have experienced and to have had interactions with these students so they didn't have the fear that I had.... then coming into this role, the inclusion role, I thought 'shoot, I had it backwards'."

Whether initiated by one event or a series of events, all of the educators identified that they realized that what they had experienced in relation to their change was a process that occurred over a period of time.

"it's definitely been a journey for me going from where I was as a student then as a teacher, being fearful to enter such a classroom [special education] to where I am now where I want the kids out and I think that the benefits of kids being out are so great. And now the kids coming through the system are just going to interact with a child with Down Syndrome or a child in a wheelchair."

"I think a realization that we could do things differently, we have to go through some of those steps to realize it and we just have to keep moving along and changing our thinking."

"Inclusion changes everything. You are constantly thinking about it, looking for barriers."

“it just changes everything if you think about it. You are constantly thinking about it. Like when you are out at the mall, oh, that’s a barrier, why is that there? or why would they say that?”

All teachers were able to identify an event or a series of events that they felt had a profound impact on their shift in pedagogy. When asked if they could identify a turning point when they remembered thinking differently about the self-contained class, some identified a series of experiences while others identified one significant moment. They described that they began to think differently about their role as a self-contained class teacher. They questioned the value and benefit of segregating students and their own responsibility as a teacher of these students in their classes. Most of the educators described their change as a result of a positive experience with students, while for others’ it was mainly as a result of a negative experience or a combination of both. One teacher indicated the change process began at the beginning of their teaching career while supply teaching;

“my shift was actually just supplying [in a self-contained class] and realizing that this is something that I enjoy and getting to know those kids. Just seeing what they could do and knowing that there’s no reason that they couldn’t be in a regular classroom, but just trying to figure out how to do it.”

Another describes the experience of change beginning while working through the process of integrating kids out and realizing that the goals envisioned for the students were not actually happening;

“then we started them in their homeroom classes, integrated with their peers everyday...now they are playing with kids on the playground, now they are getting invited to parties, now they are in class pictures... they were coming down to get the kids, you know, ‘can so and so join us because we are going on a field trip?’ and that was where I had a shift. Where we need to do something different...and that was when the wheels started turning for me. I could start seeing the possibilities.”

There were also accounts of negative experiences/challenges with other teachers and administration that influenced their change as a result of feeling the exclusion from others. Often these examples describe specific events such as school assemblies, field trips and school performances where they as teachers were challenging why the students in their special education classes were not included automatically and only after they asked. The work then to include the students was always presented as a challenge or a fight. One teacher describes an experience with a holiday concert where she worked tirelessly for her students to be participants with their peers rather than targets of judgment and pity.

“It was Christmas concert, every year my self-contained class would be involved in the Christmas concert but we had our own timeslot, so none of the students were out with their classrooms participating with same age peers in the Christmas concert and it drove me crazy. And I don’t know how to say this politically correct, it made them look terrible. You know, up in front of everybody, here comes the SCC class, ‘oh great, they did such a good job’. No they didn’t, they looked awful, they did terrible. So every year after that I was like, ‘I don’t care how many days I lose in December but we are going to every

class'. I wanted to make sure they were participating with their same age peers and to blend in and it was so much better after that. That's when my change happened."

Other teachers identified their shift as occurring when they became very aware of the behaviour and attitudes of others towards the students with exceptionalities when they were in special education classes. The recognition by these teachers that it did not matter what they did in that self-contained class to teach students or to get them integrated, as long as there was a self-contained class, students with exceptionalities would not be included.

"That was my third year in self-contained, and before that I probably would have fought tooth and nail to keep those kids in my class because I cared about them, I knew what was best for them, [and] I'm not putting them out there with other teachers that don't care about them. But when I went to that school and realized, yep, the other students did not interact with my students but more importantly the teachers would do a wide berth walking around them in the hall. And that's when I realized that self-contained settings are not a good idea for anyone. And right there I could not un-see it. That was my big shift of thinking."

"my big eye opening was when we did our first transition meetings for students to go to high school and that sense of frustration and pure madness, like I am telling you about this kid, I am telling you everything you need to know about this kid to make him successful and you are not even writing it down. You are not even looking at me when I am talking to you. And then going the next year and following up on them, just happening to go there and seeing that none of those things were done right, we're getting emails from those teachers about how much it costs for a kid to print a picture off their

computer, things that just kept these kids so happy and they are choosing not to do it and that. I can feel my blood boiling just thinking about it. That was my big eye opening, like whoa, this isn't [happening], nobody really cares about these kids- just really frustrating."

These examples set the stage for the experiences had by the participants regarding their journey as special educators shifting to an inclusive pedagogy. Through the excerpts they identified challenges and successes experienced over the course of their careers. The main themes of support and training, attitudes and perceptions, inclusive practice, and, growth and change were presented with quotations to support each. These four themes identified from the focus group aided in the questioning for the individual interviews.

The Description

The description was developed in order to encapsulate the lived experience of the educators interviewed (Giorgi, 2009). Data generated from the interviews were selected for the description in that they provided a deeper discussion of the themes generated from the focus group. The focus group data remained separate in that only five of the original ten teachers participated in interviews.

After reading the stories of the five interviewed educators several times and eliminating the redundant information, five main themes were identified, including: (1) support and training, (2) attitudes and perceptions, (3) inclusive practice, (4) growth and change, and (5) teaching practice. Four of the themes remained consistent from the focus group, support and training, attitudes and perceptions, inclusive practice and growth and change. Teaching practice was a new theme that encompassed strategies described by

the participants that did not fit within any of the four original themes from the focus group.

The first three themes, support and training, attitudes and perceptions, and inclusion addressed the research question: What has been the impact of this change in classroom placement on teachers' attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices? The final two themes, growth and change and teaching practice, addressed the research question: What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes? It should be noted however, that each theme is connected overall and there are instances where examples fall under two themes. The five themes complement each other in order to create a fuller picture of the overall change experience of these special education teachers.

Support and training is the first theme involving accounts of various opportunities or lack thereof for professional development, as well as, the types of support, including physical support and technical support, afforded to the educators while in various roles over their teaching careers. The second theme, attitudes and perceptions, considers the attitudes and perceptions held by the educators, as well as, those attitudes and perceptions they observed and experienced from others regarding the students with exceptionalities in their schools. Throughout the interviews, their beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about teaching students with exceptionalities become quite defined. They also saliently described the attitudes of others but in less detail. Inclusive practice is the third theme. Since inclusion is a key focus point of this research, examples of both successes and challenges are identified in the interviews. The fourth theme centers around the process

of change identified through various *turning points* in the educators' careers. These *turning points* offer detailed accounts of the growth and change process of the teachers. The educators discussed many examples of experiences in the classroom and discussed their strategies for programming and planning. These stories and examples fall under the final theme of teaching practice.

The following description is meant to capture the essence of the experience of these educators who have had a shift in their thinking as a result of a shift in their practice. Based on phenomenological description according to (Giorgi, 2009), the information gathered from the analysis is used to develop a single description which will represent the experience of the group. Jamie represents the educators' collective voice and experience. The description follows a thematic format where the description of 'Jamie's' experience is presented in the text paragraphs and the sidebar quotations are the direct quotations from the interviews that support Jamie's explanation.

Support and Training

Jamie began her teaching career in a self-contained class. She felt that although there was a lot of training for herself and adequate support from Educational Assistants and Child and Youth Workers, as a new teacher, there was still so much to figure out, just as it would be for any new job. It was for these reasons that sometimes she didn't know who or what supports were available outside the school itself. Looking back, Jamie now

On the topic of support and training:

"the EAs and the instruction and the training was, it was unbelievable because we were going through the ABA stuff and we were a demonstration site for Autism, so I got TEACCH training, Geneva Center, it was unbelievable the amount of training I got."

recognizes the training she had was very useful for working with students in inclusive classes. The professional development was very specific to students with exceptionalities and inclusive teaching and there was not the opportunity for professional development in other subject areas which would have helped her when she left the SCC.

When Jamie transitioned to an inclusive class, she did not feel supported in the ways that some of her colleagues were being supported. She attributed this lack of support as a result of her previous special education experience and training. Jamie was disappointed and felt that even though she had more experience than others teaching students with exceptionalities, this teaching looked very different in an inclusive class as compared to a self-contained class. She longed for the opportunity to have someone to collaborate with on best practices and strategies for including students. Jamie felt like she had a lot to learn about including kids with exceptionalities while at the same time meeting the learning needs of all of the students in the class. Since she wasn't being directly provided with this

"it was like sink or swim...I didn't even know what supports were out there...I didn't know I could say, 'hey, I'm really feeling like I could use some help here.'"

"coming into the role when I first started teaching SCC, I had a lot of learning to do."

"I remember really wanting support and not having access to it."

"SCC teachers will tell you they have missed out on a significant amount of professional development."

"PD for mainstream teachers isn't about supporting students with special needs."

"I was probably more prepared than others because I had already had that year in SCC developing programs."

"SCC teachers will tell you they have missed out on a significant amount of professional development."

"I don't think we always felt supported. I know I didn't last year with the level of need I had, but I also don't always think the EAs are the answer or the best strategy and people do."

"you did what you had to do, you learned what you had to learn."

"I was on my own, talking to people who had taught her in the past, but there was nothing provided for me."

"I sought out a teacher from another throughout school who taught the same grade I would be teaching and we met the summer and did all of our long-range planning together and we met on a weekly basis for about 2-3 hours per week in the evenings and we did all our planning together."

sort of guidance from her school or the school board, she sought out her own support and professional development through reading and finding other colleagues who have experience to collaborate with. Despite all of these factors around support, Jamie now feels that her experience contributed greatly to her success in creating an inclusive class. She also feels that support is necessary for teachers to create inclusive classrooms.

Attitudes and Perceptions

Jamie identified a shift in her thinking from when she started teaching to the present. Initially her belief was that the self-contained class was the best placement for students with exceptionalities. In this environment, she could meet the student's needs and she knew that she could protect them from the mistreatment and the attitudes of others. It was heartbreaking for Jamie when she would see her students standing alone outside at recess or being avoided in the hallway. She was appalled by the way other teachers spoke about her students based on their characteristics rather than who they were as

"because of my background in special ed, I felt comfortable with it (inclusion)"

"When teachers have support...we can see students being positively included in regular classrooms."

On the topic of attitudes and perceptions:

"this was their opportunity to get individualized instruction, small teacher to pupil ratio."

"I really felt I was making a difference to the students in my room."

"I was very worried about my students going into regular classes."

"I got so close with the kids and the families, I felt I knew them inside and out."

people. She truly cared about them and it was only in this self-contained class environment that she could protect them from these horrible things. She felt sorry for students whose parents wouldn't let them be in self-contained classes.

Overtime, Jamie started to reconsider if the self-contained class (SCC) was the best placement for her students. She began to recognize that although the students were safe and protected, were learning and seemed happy, this ideal was not 'real life'. Protecting students was not teaching them how to interact with others, solve problems, communication and many other skills essential for social existence. She recognized that schools should be providing all students with opportunities to become productive and responsible citizens. All students need and should have opportunities to have social relationships, participate in school teams and events, ride the school bus, and feel socially accepted, among other things. She tried to access opportunities for her students to be integrated into other classes but this was not as easy as she thought. Teachers were not very receptive to having her

"Halfway through the year she [the prep and planning teacher] asked me, 'who's that funny looking kid?' ...and she'd been doing prep once a week for half a year and she doesn't even know his name and hasn't made an effort..."

"I felt sad for students whose parents were not letting them attend self-contained classes. I felt that self-contained was the best placement."

So, after one year, I was like, 'I'm done'. I wanted to teach in a regular classroom."

"I had this underlying concern [about SCC] that this isn't real life."

"At that stage in my career I thought 'this is great, they are getting the support that they need and they are also making social connections' ...but I also still worried that in the SC class they were very protected and when they didn't have that placement in high school that worried me. But as the years have gone on and I have seen kid's fully integrated into classrooms and I see the success they experience - it is so much better than any of the models that I have seen up to this point."

"Through all my experiences I always felt that the kids shouldn't be here [SCC], this isn't the best place for them. But when I looked at the other side of the fence [inclusion] I wondered 'but is this the best place too?' But when I saw the way people left a kid off at the back of the room with an EA sitting beside them, I thought, 'that's not inclusion either'"

students in their class and even when they were, students were still often ostracized and isolated. She felt powerless and did not know how to empower her students. It was through these experiences that she began to consider what an ideal school placement for students with exceptionalities would be. Jamie questioned the dichotomy that she understood to exist between self-contained and mainstream classes and considered if the SCC could be a different experience for her students. Could a SCC be inclusive and provide all the opportunities and social capital her students deserved or was this an impossibility based on the way in which the school system has structured special education? She decided that leaving SCC was the only option for her and perhaps working for a classroom that was more inclusive would provide more opportunity to the students with exceptionalities she was currently teaching. When Jamie had opportunities to see with her own eyes how successful students could be in an inclusive classroom, she knew she had made the right decision. Seeing how inclusion was positively influencing *all* the students in the class and providing students with exceptionalities

“although I still struggle with some aspects of inclusion, I recognize that the regular classroom is the best option.”

“But I think it was one of those things I needed to live through. It was a process, and I needed to see it in action and working, in order to believe that it could work and be so positive and so successful.”

“but then as I got to teaching in the role, I started to recognize that the students weren’t making connections outside the classroom... they weren’t making connections within the school...and even if they were part of the community like playing on a hockey team or something like that, when it came to school, they seemed very separate and just hung out with each other or didn’t hang out with anyone at all.”

“I felt frustrated that I wasn’t able to get them into regular classes so they could be integrated based on their strengths.”

“when I was in the SCC I always felt like there were some kids that didn’t belong there.... But when I was in the SERT role listening to what other teachers were saying, ‘he needs out [of the regular classroom]’, there was always this mad rush to place kids where they ‘needed’ to be.”

“by segregating these students, we are creating a culture of exclusion that emphasizes difference.”

social capital, and at a level they did not have access to when they were in SCCs. At the same time, she recognizes that it takes a lot of work and not all teachers seem to be prepared to create inclusive classrooms due to lack of experience, opportunity and support. She still questions whether or not she is meeting the needs of her students with exceptionalities in the inclusive class, for example, through the teaching of life skills.

Inclusive Practice

For Jamie, inclusion is complicated. When she thinks about inclusion, it is not black and white, it is muddled with all sorts of competing and sometimes conflicting considerations, such as attitude, experience, training, guidance, support and opportunity. Jamie recognizes that the idea of inclusion has shifted over time from when she first started teaching to the present. In the beginning of her teaching career Jamie identified a lot more push back by other teachers when it came to including students with exceptionalities from her SCC. She felt that others had low expectations of students from SCC being successful and high expectations of their (the students) failure. These attitudes made her question the benefit of inclusion at that time. Jamie witnessed

On the topic of Inclusive Practice

"I have mixed feelings though. I have concerns about kids going through an inclusion process without having the right supports and the right attitudes to do it."

"The challenge [with inclusion] has come from trying to create a school/classroom environment that is accepting. Accepting actually within the classroom walls and on the playground on the outdoor recess part."

"I would look outside while they were in gym and I would see them standing there in a little cluster by themselves, there was no effort to include them and I would always feel like...it was just such a struggle and a push to get them out and I wondered if it was really benefiting them and who we were doing it for. Because they never really seemed to enjoy it [inclusion] when they were there."

"I started with some integration...thinking that would be a nice next step, where they would go out for a period a day...there wasn't a huge change with their social relationships because they still weren't part of the class, they were visitors."

her students being bullied and ostracized by others and questioned if this inclusion was providing the hoped for social outcomes. Jamie identified this internal struggle she faced about meeting student needs and the social stigma the students experienced. She wanted to protect and meet their needs but also wanted them to be accepted by others in the genuine way that she accepted them.

When she moved into an inclusive classroom teacher role, it was essential that students with exceptionalities were on the class roster and spend significant chunks of their day if not all of their day in the classroom. She quickly recognized the support that students with exceptionalities experience by their peers. She witnessed a lot of growth in the other students- they were developing understanding, and compassion and in turn became advocates for each other. Students with exceptionalities began to develop friendships, make connections with classmates and become accepted as a part of the class. Jamie now recognizes inclusion as requiring differentiating, re-inventing, adjusting, creating activities specific for the group of students currently in your class, risk taking, presuming

"I am not sure I would have been confident enough to send them back out into a classroom when acceptance really wasn't at its highest point.

"When we started to do that sort of thing where the kids spent chunks of their day and they were on the class roster, we started to see kids making friendships and being invited to birthday parties and things like that, they started to have a connection."

"You know who grew the most? The mainstream students, not our students with exceptionalities. They grew, but not near what our kids who had zero experience with students with exceptionalities grew, and understood and became advocates."

"The kids learned how to speak to him and he learned how to speak to them and how to be appropriate in public places."

"It opened a whole new world for her"

"And when you talk to him he says 'this is awesome! I am just like everyone else'."

"I would see kids not so much relying on the teacher...but their first step would be that they are stepping in and helping out without having to be prompted or asked."

"In terms of including students with exceptionalities in the regular classroom, I think the first thing is we want to presume competency- that students can achieve."

competency, collaborating with other teachers, thinking outside the box, and trial and error. When she taught her students skills for co-operative learning where the teacher is a facilitator and there is a positive classroom environment, everyone in the class learned to be responsible for each other. “It was just business as usual for those students because they just understood that you just do that as a good class member, you just look out for each other.”

Growth and Change

Through Jamie’s experience, elements of change are evident. She identifies her change process as taking years to play out. Experiences she had in the beginning of her career influenced decisions she made later on and continues to play out in her current teaching practice. Jamie identifies thinking differently now about including students with exceptionalities, then when she was teaching SCC. This change in her perception influenced her teaching practice. She once believed in the strength of the SCC in order to provide specific programming for students and cared deeply about the work she was doing. At various points along the

“everyone is working on similar type tasks but just the goals within those tasks could look different.”

“You don’t get to see that being an SCC teacher, the bonds and the learning really balance.”

On the topic of Growth and Change

“I feel like it was a process that I had to experience and see with my own eyes and be a part of to appreciate the change and the growth and the fact that it’s [inclusion] possible because I have seen it.”

now earlier on in my career, I would have felt more torn about [inclusion] because I did see at that time some positives.”

“those kids were protected and I could look out for them.”

“I felt sad for students whose parents were not letting them attend self-contained classes. I felt that self-contained was the best placement.”

“you can make a difference with 10 kids and all the right materials”

“I was also frustrated that my students in the SCC could not find enough integration placements.”

“But when I see the way people left a kid sitting at the back of the room with and EA sitting beside them, I thought, that’s not inclusion either.”

“people are afraid of change.”

way, she questioned why students were not accepted by others and she became deeply frustrated and disturbed by this dynamic. Jamie quickly became aware of the challenges involved with including students and recognized a large factor was based on the attitudes and fears of other staff members. She began questioning her teaching practice in the SCC- would she want her child in a class such as that which she was teaching? Why are these children in these classes? Why do these classes exist?

Jamie came to realize that as a society we have a culture of othering, thus making it socially acceptable to exclude people. For her inclusion was far more than students in her SCC class being able to go into another class for music or art or even math. It was about students with exceptionalities being accepted by their peers because they belong in classrooms with their peers, and she understood the only way to do this was to create an inclusive classroom for all her students. She made a choice to leave SCC because her beliefs were no longer aligned with the segregated special education model. Although, she was not completely

"There was this underlying concern that this isn't real life [SCC]."

"But that's when I really started thinking 'would I want my child in this classroom?'"

"students weren't making connections outside of the classroom...they weren't making connections within the school."

"It was at that moment that I realized the girls who were doing the bullying were excluding her because we, as a society, have encouraged exclusion."

"I want to be in a more diverse setting where these kids are a part of it. I don't want to be the person who is trying to ship them off somewhere."

"I saw those kids being so included and kids looking out for them and kids helping them and seeing them grow not only socially, but seeing the academic piece...that helped me appreciate it [inclusion] more."

"I can now see the broader opportunities that a regular classroom provides. More access to language, even if it's just talking and listening to other students their age, more opportunities for age appropriate activities."

"When you do lots of reading, it can shift you, it can make you open to the possibilities and make you aware of things that maybe you didn't know that you didn't know."

"But until I lived it and did the work, that was the shift for me."

sure she aligned with inclusion, she was somewhere in the middle, and, she was sure that there was something better for these students.

Through experiences and inspiring conversations with others, Jamie began to see how inclusion could be successful for students with exceptionalities and the positive impact inclusion has on the whole classroom. All students can participate and learn in meaningful ways at all levels of the happenings of a classroom and a school. She engaged in personal professional development and found that this learning made her open to possibilities and aware of things that she was not previously aware of. Witnessing the results of positive inclusion was the most powerful change agent for Jamie.

Teaching Practice

Jamie identified that developing and implementing inclusive practice poses many challenges for educators, even those who have special education training and experience, including time to prepare materials. As with any new practices, trial and error was often employed for differentiating curriculum and past lessons were not readily used in order to meet the needs of all learners in the inclusive class. Differentiating her approaches to lessons and delivery became more important than ever so that all students could access the curriculum. By constantly reviewing her lesson goals and making adjustments so that the needs of all students

On the topic of Teaching Practice

"How do you create a program that is truly differentiated but doesn't ostracize them?"

"I was probably more prepared than others because I already had that year in SCC developing programs."

"I felt overwhelmed and pressured and frustrated at times and perhaps I wasn't meeting their needs."

In terms of including students with exceptionalities in the regular classroom...the first thing is we want to presume competency-that students can achieve."

"I am now using my training as a special education teacher to promote inclusion- although I feel that I still have lots to learn about doing this successfully."

were accounted for, she was coming up with new and innovative ways to teach concepts. Although she felt confident in her ability to develop and implement program goals, at the same time Jamie was concerned that she wasn't adequately meeting the learning needs of the students with exceptionalities in the same way she would have had she had them in a self-contained class. Jamie found that once she gave the students with exceptionalities some independence in class, she started to see them grow socially and other students in the class would step up and become involved in the learning process of the students with exceptionalities. Although Jamie was willing to try to meet all of the needs of the various learners and create an inclusive classroom, she was frustrated by the teaching practices of others who were not as willing to do the extra work. Jamie wanted to help her colleagues but did not know how to go about doing this.

"the kids learned how to speak to him and he learned how to speak to them and how to be appropriate in public places."

"they're [teachers] struggling, really struggling and they still want them [students with exceptionalities] in their own class not bothering anybody."

"my question is, 'how can I support you?'"

"As I look back, I didn't do anything wrong, but man if I knew then what I know now, it would never look the way I taught it."

"but I always found a way that those kids were at the forefront of my planning."

"we are still working on ABC and you are teaching paragraph formation; how are you ever going to have enough time to meet the needs of this student?"

"I never whipped out a single lesson I did before with that class because I had to adjust everything for that group."

Summary of the Findings

Through the use of three data collection methods, questionnaire, focus group and interviews, the findings suggest that special education teachers experience a shift to inclusive practice in similar ways to each other. They identified several factors that

influenced their experiences including teaching practice, support and training, attitudes of others, their perception of inclusion and both positive and negative experiences of inclusion. These findings suggest that when educators recognize the factors involved in inclusive practice, they are able to adjust their beliefs and practice in relation to teaching students with exceptionalities. As previously discussed, classroom teachers have been found to express more favourable attitudes toward including students with exceptionalities after they have specific training and positive opportunities to experience inclusion (Evans, 1996). To address the study's first research question, "What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes?" educators shared their experiences teaching in a self-contained special education class and their transition to their current role in an inclusive classroom setting through the survey, a focus group and interviews. These stories individually, organized into themes and further compiled into the phenomenological description exemplified this change experience. To address the second research question, "How has this change in classroom placement impacted their attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices?", the findings from the survey, the focus group and interviews, indicated that there are several factors involved in how one recognizes their change experience. The educators discussed teaching practice, support and training, attitudes of others, their perception of inclusion and both positive and negative experiences of inclusion as contributing to their overall change process. Jamie's description presents the interview data from the five teachers as one collective account based on the five identified themes.

The following chapters will provide a discussion of these findings, identifying the significance of this research for current inclusive teaching practice, considerations for future teaching practice and teacher training as well as recommendations for further research in this area.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

From a critical disability, rights based framework, the inclusion of students with exceptionalities is based on the foundation of changing school environments and attitudes which are exclusive in order to uphold the fundamental human rights of each child to fully access education within their neighborhood school along with their grade appropriate peers (Burghardt, 2011; CRPD, 2007; Harpur, 2012; Rioux & Valentine, 2006). Despite the many challenges that exist systematically and attitudinally, it is through changing structures such as self-contained classrooms and teacher attitudes toward inclusion that this education model will come to fruition.

The current research examined a group of educators under-represented in the literature. The attitudes and beliefs about inclusion of special education teachers working in self-contained classes has only briefly been addressed and findings have not been conclusive comparatively as to whether special education teachers hold positive beliefs about inclusion or not (Bekirogullari et al., 2011; Boer et al. 2011; Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999, MacFarlane & Wolfson, 2013). However, studies involving teacher change in general indicate that positive experiences, such as a student with an exceptionality achieving a concept far greater than the teacher imagined or developing friendships with their classmates, can alter beliefs about teaching students with exceptionalities in inclusive classes (Evans, 1996; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009). Special education teachers included in these previously mentioned studies are those working in a resource teacher role and not those working in self-contained or inclusive classes. Therefore, the current study addressed a specific group, special education teachers, who seem to be underrepresented in the literature. To address this issue, the current study examined the change experiences of special education teachers who have previously

taught in self-contained classes and have recently moved class placement (in the last 5 years) to an inclusive class setting.

This chapter provides a discussion of the results of the study as they relate to the research questions: What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes? What has been the impact of this change in classroom placement on teachers' attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices?

Discussion of the Findings

In examining the results of the data presented in Chapter Four, this discussion will focus on each measure utilized followed by an overall integration of the results collected. The findings from the survey, the focus group and the interviews shed light on the experience of this group of educators. These educators all identified in their anecdotes, moments where their thoughts about segregating students with exceptionalities shifted from that of a positive environment to questioning that there must be a better alternative. As they answered specific questions about their teaching practice and personal beliefs and described various experiences over the course of their teaching careers, their change process became evident. The descriptive statistics provided a baseline comparison of where the teachers were at with respect to their personal attitudes and beliefs about inclusion. The focus group and the interviews provided an opportunity for the educators to share specific experiences and consider their own change experience. These accounts were then interpreted by the researcher to analyze and discuss the significance of their experiences within five themes: teaching practice, attitudes and perceptions, support and training, inclusion, and growth and change. Data from the focus group provided a

broader look at the experiences of the educators as they moved from self-contained to inclusive classes. The five interviews were interpreted by the researcher to create a representative description of the essence of the experiences had by all five teachers.

Discussion on Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics play an important role in answering the second research question: How has this change in classroom placement impacted their attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices? Similar to the findings of Forlin, (2001) and Reiser and Secretariat, (2012), the educators in this study identified being concerned about the challenge of teaching an inclusive class including having an increased work load as a result of having students with exceptionalities in their classes. Forlin et al., (2009) and Sharma et al., (2012) indicated that in order for teachers to experience a change in attitude around inclusion, they need to actively engage in and experience success in an inclusive setting. The teachers in the current study indicated that after teaching in an inclusive class, they identified holding more positive views of inclusion than before, and they felt more confident to continue teaching in an inclusive class. Further, similar to the findings in Mukhopadhyay (2014), the teachers in this study indicated that they felt that students with exceptionalities benefitted both socially and academically from an inclusive class and students without exceptionalities benefitted socially. This observation made by the teachers indicates a possible factor that has contributed to their change in perception. When educators can see positive results of an initiative, they are more likely to want to change their views and practice in support of it (Pyhältö, 2012; Richardson, 1998).

Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2008) discussed the importance of the support of school administrators in the implementation of inclusive classrooms. The teachers in this study also indicated the importance of administration as essential for the success of inclusion. Professional development and access to opportunities to collaborate were also rated to be very beneficial in supporting these teachers which is consistent with previous research (Berry, 2011; Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Ivey & Reinke, 2002; Male, 2011). Since the school board in this study was responsible for initiating this change, the experiences of these educators are based on a shift that is supported by the senior administration. Although these findings provide insight into the experiences of educators within this school board, support from school and school board leaders has been identified as an important factor to the successful implementation of inclusion where students with exceptionalities flourish and are valued.

Discussion on Focus Group Themes

The opportunity to have a conversation with 10 educators about their experiences in both SCC and inclusive classes provided more in-depth responses to some of the main ideas outlined in the descriptive statistics. It is through the shared experiences of the participants in this study and the questions that they asked themselves at various points in their careers that the first research questions can be answered: What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes? The following section provides a discussion around the factors that contributed to the shift in thinking of the educators as supported by the literature.

As the teachers in this study provided examples of their experiences in SCC, they identified the closeness of the relationship they had with the students by knowing them so

well. They felt this contributed to their ability to develop appropriate programs for their students to access. They all identified thoroughly enjoying teaching in a SCC which indicated their belief in this model. They had concerns about including their students into settings that were not welcoming and wanted to protect them. It is at this point in their career their perceptions and beliefs were in alignment with a charity model of inclusion, as defined in chapter 2 (Burghart, 2011; Clapton & Fitzgerald, 1997; Lawson, 2006; Quinn, 2009).

These ten teachers individually expressed challenges they faced while in the role of the SCC teacher which included the attitudes of their colleagues towards the students in their classes. Vaughn and Schrumm (1995) found that one of the main barriers identified by mainstream classroom teachers to creating inclusive classrooms as being a lack of collaboration between general and special educators. For the participants of this study, when their colleagues would speak about the students with exceptionalities in a derogatory manner or express an unwillingness to integrate students in their classes, the special education teachers noted disappointment and shock. The negative attitudes of others that they experienced were troubling to them in that they recognized the attitudes were directly related to the students with exceptionalities.

Although generally, teachers have been found to hold positive attitudes about inclusion (Berry, 2011; Ivey & Reinke, 2002; Male, 2011), the findings presented from the current research are not surprising considering that some of the literature around teacher attitude toward students with exceptionalities indicates that most educators are not comfortable teaching students with exceptionalities. Current literature identifies that overall teachers hold neutral or negative attitudes toward inclusion (Boer et al., 2011;

Mukhopadhyay, 2014). The special education teachers in this study had a vested interest in the well-being of the students they were teaching and recognized that the negative attitudes of others would affect the ability of the students with exceptionalities to be included.

All ten teachers who participated, were able to identify a shift in thinking or a turning point as to when their views about educating students with exceptionalities changed. It is at this turning point where their views change from charity lens to a rights-based lens of inclusion (CRPD, 2007; Harpur, 2012; Lawson, 2006; Stein, 2007). Each of these critical moments was as a result of an experience or conversation had by these educators; some positively related to inclusion, such as, students in mainstream classes asking for classmates from the SCC to join them for a party or class picture, but most negatively related to inclusion, including negative attitudes and comments of others. It was during these experiences and conversations where the participants questioned their views and roles in the educational experience of the students they were teaching. This is described by Pyhältö et al. (2012) that as a result of their questioning, these educators identified themselves as active change agents because they could holistically see the ‘what’ about their current practice that needed to be changed in some way. Once they recognized their own personal shift, they were able to develop an understanding that shifting the way one thinks about inclusion is a process, and their colleagues were at a different point in this process than they were. These teachers were at a point that Evans (1996) identified as being able to balance autonomy with community. They understood their beliefs and their roles in the school community which assisted them to move forward and develop inclusive classrooms.

Once in the role of teaching in an inclusive classroom, they discussed successes they experienced with inclusion and the positive effect it had on all the students in the class. This research supports the literature that currently reports contradictory findings where some special education teachers felt students with exceptionalities would benefit from inclusion and some felt they would not (Bekirogullari et al., 2011; Wolfson et al., 2007). The teachers in this study based their judgment as to whether or not the inclusion was successful on the reactions and outcomes of the entire class. At this point, they recognized that despite the extra work necessary, they were doing the right thing. They were witnessing students with exceptionalities having successful experiences in inclusive classrooms: accessing the curriculum, building relationships and developing independence. The rest of the students were developing empathy, understanding and communication skills and a more open way of looking at the world around them. For the teachers, this work of creating inclusive classrooms made good sense when all students were demonstrating so much growth and a sense of belonging.

Jamie, the Representative Case

The description is intended to answer both research questions as it provides an integrated portrayal of the five interviewed teachers. Some of the information presented in the description overlaps with the survey and focus group data, as it further fills in gaps and provides greater detail into the change experience of a special education teacher moving from a self-contained class setting to an inclusive class. The description also connects the second research question to the survey and focus group data already discussed by providing examples of how attitudes and teaching practice changed once in an inclusive classroom. Although each of the five educators who provided a detailed

account of their experience from when they first began teaching in self-contained classes to currently teaching in inclusive setting have their own story, they share many common elements to their journeys.

While recognizing that across the province of Ontario, many levels of service delivery exist for students with exceptionalities including segregated special education classes, inclusive classrooms and everything in between. This study focuses specifically on the inclusion of students with exceptionalities based on the definition of inclusion as being demonstrated by the academic and social gains of student with exceptionalities while working collaboratively in classrooms with peers in neighbourhood schools.

In examining how the description answers the first research question “What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes?” we will first consider the supports in place for these educators at various points in their careers. Leyser et al. (2011) and Mukhopadhyay (2014) found that specific training for educators was a prerequisite to effectively implement inclusion. The educators in this study identified receiving a lot of training while in the self-contained class role as well as adequate teaching assistant support. However, when they moved into inclusive classes, they found that although their previous special education training was very beneficial to include students with exceptionalities, they lacked the skills in other curriculum content areas because they hadn’t had very much experience in this area. Similarly, in other studies, teachers without special education training felt unequipped to teach in inclusive classes based on their lack of training and experience (Kgothule & Hay, 2013; Male, 2011).

In the current study, the teachers felt that assumptions were made by the school board and administrators regarding their ability to implement inclusion based on their special education experience. Assumptions that inclusion would be easy for them, and so, they received little support if any relating to their areas of need. This finding is interesting in that current literature identifies support and training as key components to successful inclusion (Berry, 2011; Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Ivey & Reinke, 2002; Male, 2011; Richardson, 1998). The teachers in this study felt prepared for inclusion in a very different way than reported by mainstream teachers receiving training to teach inclusive classes (Leyser, Zeiger & Romi, 2011). This topic will be further discussed in the implications for practice section in Chapter 6.

Consistent with the findings of the few studies that examined the attitudes specifically of special education teachers toward inclusion, the educators in the current study felt, at one time, that the self-contained class was the best placement for students with exceptionalities. It was in this environment that they were able to meet the needs of their students and protect them from the mistreatment of others (Bekirogullari, 2011; Cook et al., 1999). In the current study, as teachers spent time in the SCC they began to question their practice within the SCC as a result of various obstacles they encountered including the negative attitudes of others as well as their own beliefs about what is fair and just for their students. Through their personal questioning, they began to develop belief systems that are consistent with what Rioux and Valentine (2006) and Harpur (2012), described as a human rights approach, where change must occur with the structure or system in order to meet the needs of the students with exceptionalities. The participants identified that something needed to change about how students with

exceptionalities were being serviced in schools. In alignment with Katsui and Kumpuvuori (2008), the teachers in the current study recognized that their charity-based approaches were failing to empower their students with exceptionalities to make their own decisions and develop autonomy. They felt that they could adjust teaching practice with a change in their role to an inclusive classroom teacher in order to better meet their newer human rights beliefs about teaching students with exceptionalities.

In considering the second research question: “What has been the impact of this change in classroom placement on teachers’ attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices?” the description sheds light on the change process involved in the transitions of the educators in this study. Their practice as well as their overall attitude and perceptions have been altered. They identified inclusion as something that is complicated in that there are many factors that contribute to its success. Similar to the findings of Forlin et al., (2009) and Sharma et al., (2012), attitudinal shifts have occurred in the participants as a result of positive experiences in inclusive settings. While teaching in an SCC role, the teachers in this study identified concerns about the well-being of the students if they were in an inclusive class. They were concerned that the needs of the students would not be met and felt that mainstream class teachers would not be able to meet all of their needs as well as they, themselves could in the self-contained class.

Once the teachers moved out of the SCC, they identified changes to their practice. Initially, they felt confident to develop parallel programs for students with exceptionalities in their class. However, they quickly understood that parallel programming was not the intention of inclusion and their students with exceptionalities

were still segregated from their peers. Students did not have a sense of belonging. As noted in the literature belonging is the key to successful inclusion (Bennett, 2009; Porter, 2010). By collaborating with others, researching teaching methods, and revamping previously used lessons, they began to develop lessons and programs that were inclusive. Important factors identified included, developing a classroom culture, including peers in the inclusion, differentiating lessons and having high expectations of students. These factors are consistent with responses given by the other teachers in the focus group.

In order to fully understand if a genuine pedagogical change has occurred for these educators, the final question in the interview asked whether or not they would go back into a self-contained class teacher role. All of the teachers interviewed said that based on the change in their beliefs about educating students with exceptionalities, they would not go back into a self-contained class settings. They identified that if they had known what they now know about inclusive education, their practice of special education would look very different from what it looked like when they were teaching SCC. The combination of change in belief and change in practice indicates a pedagogical shift for these teachers.

Connecting the Findings

Since change has been found to occur at different rates over time, the findings in this research support this notion of change as a process (Maskit, 2011; Phyhalto, 2012). All of the 10 educators involved in this research, from the focus group and the interviews, identified a shift in the way they think about educating and including students with exceptionalities to some degree or another, occurring over the course of their teaching careers, initially in self-contained special education classes and currently in inclusive

classes. The measures used to gather data (survey, focus group and interviews) provided triangulation of data according to case study methods (Yin, 2009), as well as, used the descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2009) in order to develop a single shared representation of change for these educators. The three separate measures helped to ensure consistency and accuracy of the information shared by the participants in order to address possible threats to trustworthiness (Yin, 2009).

Common themes emerged from the three methods used to collect data. The themes of support and training, attitudes and perceptions, inclusive practice, growth and change and teaching practice arose throughout the data analysis. The survey questions were divided into three categories which were mapped onto the themes which emerged from the focus group and interviews. The three categories of questions allowed for overlapping of the responses and reinforced how the research questions were addressed. The quotations provided to support this section are labeled as focus group or interview in order to protect the identity of the participants but to help make connections between the two methods.

The first category of interview questions involved personal experiences and perceptions of inclusion which overlapped with the themes of attitudes and perceptions and growth and change. When answering these questions, participants indicated their level of preparedness for inclusion and their overall view of inclusion after having had experiences with teaching inclusive classrooms. These answers indicated that for the most part, they anticipated teaching students with exceptionalities would be challenging, but they indicated that after their experience, they felt more knowledgeable and held more positive views of inclusion. Findings were consistent with responses given during

the focus group when educators indicated that “having those students in your class, in your surroundings, they are catalysts for the change. People’s minds change when they can see those kids and that they can learn and make friends and that things are okay” (focus group). Similarly, interview responses discussed common ideas of a change in views about inclusion, “My view has changed. I can now see the broader opportunities that a regular classroom provides” (interview). Another teacher recognized that witnessing successfully implemented inclusion helped to understand the change,

“I feel like it was a process that I had to experience and see with my own eyes and be a part of it to appreciate the change and the growth and the fact that it is possible because I have seen it” (interview).

The next set of survey questions are grouped under the category of effects of inclusion on students, where participants answered questions related to how they felt inclusion had impacted all the students in their classes. The educators indicated that they felt that all students with and without exceptionalities in inclusive classes had more opportunity for social development. For academic achievement, overall not all educators agreed that students with and without exceptionalities had more opportunity. This notion of the effects on students was a re-occurring comment that emerged throughout focus group and interviews within the themes of inclusion and teaching practice. As mentioned in the findings, one teacher shared her experience with students “...and you start to see some of the stronger athletes or the regular students start to take over the teacher role and say ‘now remember, not in your mouth; watch me this is how we do this’” (focus group). Another built upon this idea; “I didn’t have to pick that responsible kid to sit with her, they were going to her and they wanted to be with her...I think they got more out of it,

having her there” (interview). Finally, one teacher talks about the benefits on the students with exceptionalities,

“I saw those kids being so included and kids looking out for them and kids helping them and seeing them grow not only socially but seeing the academic piece and not having that nagging concern that I wasn’t meeting all their needs. I think that helped me appreciate it more” (interview).

The remaining survey questions and responses were grouped into the category of supports, which mirrors the theme of support found in both the focus group and interviews. All participants indicated on the questionnaire that support from administration was essential for successful inclusion as well they felt they would benefit from access to professional development and human supports in order to better implement inclusion. Similarly, teachers in the focus group indicated that, “It would have to start with education, like educating teachers so that they have the skills available to them” (focus group). “Time for teachers to peer coach, so working together to try things in your class and to collaborate” (focus group). These ideas were also found in the interviews where teachers shared ideas around what supports or lack of supports they had in place and what they felt would have helped them. One teacher said, “I remember really wanting that support and not having access to it...not everybody is getting the same level of support” (interview). Another discussed the positives of providing the support, “when teachers have support which could look like coaching, we can see students being positively included in regular classrooms” (interview).

Examining all of the data gathered, the connections between the information that the educators were providing showed consistent messages about their experiences

including students with exceptionalities. The three categories from the survey overlap with the themes that emerged from both the focus group and the interviews. The following section provides a synthesis of the data presented here as well as makes connections with past literature in the form of a model which exemplifies the process of change that these educators have addressed in the survey, the focus group and the interviews.

The Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change

Although this was not a grounded theory study, the findings presented in Chapter 4 can be best exemplified in a visual form. The analysis of the change experienced by these educators led me to develop a visual representation supported both by previous research in the field and the current findings. Bearing in mind the literature on teacher change (Evans, 1996; Giangreco et al., 1994; Gibbs 2007; Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Pyhältö et al., 2012) and through examining the experiences of the educators in this study the *Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change* (Figure 1), has been developed. The representation combines the manner in which the educators in this study, identified their own change process in relation to the way they describe their perceptions, the attitudes of others and their experiences with the students in their classes.

Giangreco et al. (1994) discussed a model for inclusive classrooms to demonstrate five characteristics including: heterogeneous grouping, a sense of belonging, shared activities with individualized outcomes, use of environments frequented by all people and a balanced educational experience. Although this model is over 20 years old, its' underlying concepts are consistent with what more recent literature discusses in a less systematic way (Reiser & Secretariat, 2012; Sharma et al., 2012). Utilizing Giangreco et

al.'s (1994) model as a basis, the data collected in the current study allowed itself to be sorted into a continuum of change specifically related to these inclusive educators' experiences. As the educators discussed their experiences, the five elements: environments, heterogeneous grouping, balanced educational experience, shared experiences with individual outcomes, and belonging, addressed by Giangreco et al. (1994) arose at different times throughout their careers.

The teachers in this study discussed use of environments early on in their attempts to have students with exceptionalities integrated into mainstream classes. Heterogeneous grouping, where students are with their age appropriate peers with diverse levels of ability, and a balanced educational experience were desires these teachers had for their students in SCC. They strove to access these opportunities only to be confronted with numerous challenges and obstacles entrenched in the segregated system they were working in. It was not until they began developing inclusive classroom environments as mainstream teachers that they were able to fully differentiate and create shared experiences with individual outcomes. This step is further supported by Grierson and Gallagher (2009) who insist that positive experiences with inclusion are key to shifting attitudes.

A sense of belonging for all students is the final step, once the former four are established in an inclusive classroom. This is where the educators in the current study identified a complete understanding of the big picture of including individuals based on fundamental human rights through a critical lens where the barriers created by systems are challenged and replaced with structures that are not exclusionary as identified by Horkheimer, (1972) and Rioux and Valentine, (2006). When placed in an order

according to the change experience of the educators in the current research, critical theory, Giangreco et al.'s (1994) model, as well as the findings of others (Reiser & Secretariat, 2012; Sharma et al., 2012), provided background support for the *Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change*.

Various researchers have proposed frameworks for stages of professional development and teachers' readiness for pedagogical change according to their years of experience (Maskit, 2011; Mukhopadhyay, 2014). The current visual representation illustrates in a graphic way the findings as reported in the research. It allows the reader to explore graphically, the responses and interpretation captured in this research study. Professional readiness and teaching practices as well as the opportunity to access authentic experiences including students with exceptionalities, are integrated. By combining concepts from the literature reviewed as well as the findings from the current research, the *Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change* was created. The graphic further elaborates on and provides a representation of how one moves through the educator's change process while developing inclusive classrooms. This visual representation begins when an educator first makes a decision to start the endeavor to conceptualize, value and adopt an inclusive pedagogy.

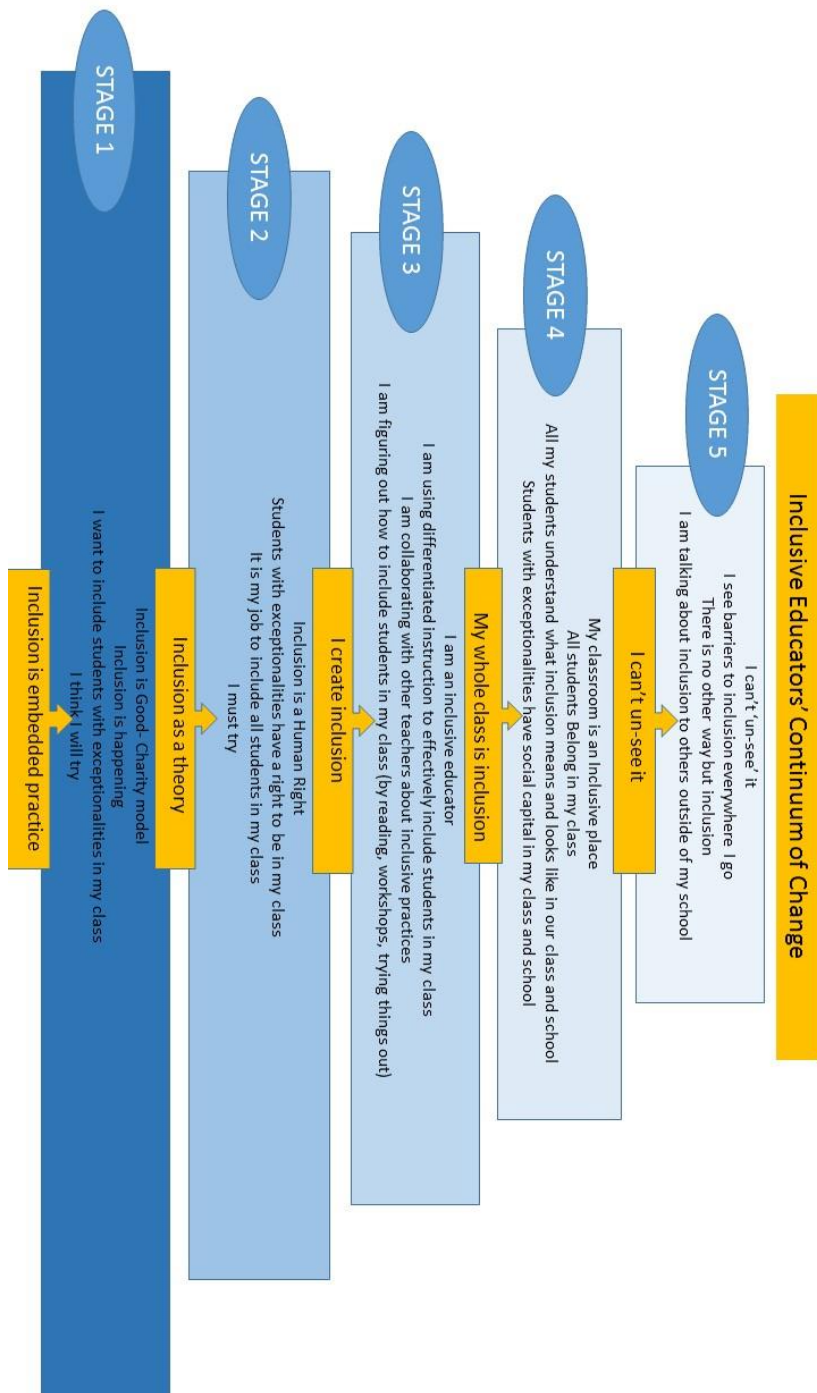


Figure 1. Inclusive educators' continuum of change.

The Inclusive Educator's Continuum of Change was designed to help describe a process of change that some educators may experience as they consider and deliver inclusive programming in their classrooms. Whenever new initiatives, such as inclusion, become forefronts of programming and planning in schools, a process of change is evident and expected on some level. This particular change is deeply rooted in the educators' beliefs and practice. As the educators learn and develop their inclusive pedagogy, they appeared to move through five stages. Stage 1 can be defined as "Inclusion is embedded practice" where educators hold charity based beliefs about inclusion. They identify that inclusion in a broader sense is good teaching practice and identify their own desire to include students in their classrooms.

In Stage 2, "Inclusion as a theory", educators begin to understand inclusion from a theoretical perspective of human rights. It is at this stage where educators recognize that students with exceptionalities should be in regular classrooms and it is their job as an educator to facilitate inclusion in their classrooms. When an educator moves into Stage 3, "I create Inclusion", their focus is on how their teaching practice and strategies create inclusion for the students in their classroom. They recognize their responsibility to adjust their teaching and implement practices of Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning as essential to the inclusion of all students in their classrooms.

It is in Stage 4, "My class is Inclusion" where educators understand the importance of creating a classroom environment that promotes inclusion. They see inclusion extending beyond their lessons and encompassing the attitudes and beliefs of all students in the class and in the school. Educators at Stage 4 recognize the genuine, natural relationships and reactions that occur on a daily basis. For educators who reach

Stage 5, “I can’t un-see it”, they will express not being able to imagine education being any other way but inclusive. They identify barriers to inclusion in their daily lives outside of the school, in the larger community and society as a whole. It is at this point where Inclusion becomes a part of who they are as a person. The following provides several examples from the data collected that illustrate what a teacher might say at each of the five stages.

At Stage 1 **“Inclusion is embedded practice (Charity)”** educators expressed their beliefs in ways which align with the underlying concepts of a charity-based model. For example, one teacher discussed the basic life skills needs of certain students such as toileting as being the responsibility of the school system;

“Because some of the needs we need to prepare them for are life skills based needs like proper toileting. If you ignore those needs, you are doing that student a grave disservice because these are skills they need to survive and be helpful citizens in the general public.”

Another example of a charity-based view involves the notion of parallel programming where students are working on the same subject areas but not as part of the whole class;

“This young lady was with part of our classroom, they were with her in the gym, I mean she was included in all things, like when I was doing language novel studies with the kids, she was doing a primary C book, still in the language program but not doing activities with the other kids.”

At Stage 2 **“Inclusion as a theory (Rights)”** educators expressed their beliefs about resources and opportunities for students with exceptionalities in inclusive classrooms.

“Sometimes, I think, it’s that feeling of, I don’t know if I have enough resources...”

When teachers start to recognize the increase in opportunities for students with exceptionalities, they recognize inclusion to be more about having access and less about what seems like the right thing to do. The following example highlights the teacher’s recognition of the social gains afforded by inclusion; “I can now see the broader opportunities that a regular classroom provides. More access to language, even if it’s just talking or listening to other students their age... more access to curriculum. The social opportunities are the most important.”

At Stage 3 “**I create inclusion**” educators begin to recognize the importance of their role in how inclusion is facilitated in their classrooms. They identify best practices and take ownership of the creative ways in which inclusion plays out in all aspects of their classrooms; “The trick is to blend recommendations from professional reports with the regular curriculum for example how to structure a gym class so that everyone stretches but the student who requires physio does their stretches to meet their physio goals.”

“I always found a way that those kids were at the forefront of my planning, when I planned my lessons.”

“I never whipped out a single lesson I did before with that class because I had to adjust everything for the group I had sitting in front of me.”

At Stage 4 “**My class is inclusion**” educators describe the importance of the whole class community in creating inclusive classrooms. Through opportunity and engagement, all students have an essential role in promoting inclusion. The way in which the teacher builds the classroom culture into a community is essential to promote student involvement. The following examples highlight the role other students play in inclusive

classrooms:

“I didn’t have to pick that responsible kid to sit with her, they were going up to her, they wanted to be with her, which was so great to see.”

“students in the regular class can be advocates for children with exceptionalities.”

“she had true friendships in the classroom, they [other students] were not just there to help her out but she would go and stay at their houses- and those things wouldn’t happen if she was in a special class.”

“everyone in that classroom feels a responsibility for every other person, not just the students who have any special needs.”

“that was just business as usual for those students because they just understood that you just do that as a good class member, you just look out for each other.”

“inclusion is more of a feel...like when you walk into a class and you get a sense that all the kids are one- productive but also enjoying their place.”

At Stage 5 “**I can’t un-see it**” educators expressed their views about inclusion as being a part of their belief system. An inclusive society goes beyond what happens in classrooms and school but extends well into all other aspects of society and life. The way in which they think about inclusion and segregation relies on a rights-based premise that flows throughout their veins. Comments made by educators at this stage include:

“I think it has to do with being able to work with someone [a colleague] to think outside the box, because there isn’t necessarily one right answer or one simple solution but it’s more trial and error.”

“By segregating students, we are creating a culture of exclusion that emphasizes difference.”

“I started thinking that if all children in a school and outside of school have that understanding, what an amazing society we would live in”

“I feel like now, everywhere I go I see things as inclusive or as not inclusive- you can’t un-see it”

“now I am starting to think longer term, in terms of kids getting employment and kids leading a meaningful life.”

“You are constantly thinking about it. Like when you are out at the mall- oh that’s a barrier, why is that there?, or, why would they say that?”

The ability to critically think about inclusion and segregation in our world is crucial to Stage 5. Teachers identified thinking outside the box and thinking about inclusion everywhere, help teachers to really understand the complex nature of inclusion in our world. As teachers works through the concept of implementing inclusion in their classroom, they consider, critique and reconsider many aspects related to their own embedded belief systems, those belief systems of others, their own pedagogy and their own teaching goals. All of these factors contribute to movement through the five stages outlined in the *Inclusive Educator’s Continuum of Change*.

In the following chapter the implications for practice and policy are discussed. Based on the findings and discussion presented thus far, Chapter 6 provides a synthesis of how educators, administrators and policy makers move forward in creating inclusive classrooms and schools.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The following chapter provides a discussion of the implications of the findings of this study. Implications for theory are presented in reference to frameworks for teacher change presented in the current literature. The visual representation presented in Chapter 5 identifies the movement of an educator through the beginning stage of inclusive thought (charity-based lens) to a deep understanding of inclusion (rights-based/critical theory lens). Implications for practice consider how these findings can be used to better understand the process of change and inclusive practice of these educators and how educators having a similar experience can be supported, and what are the best practices for educators moving from self-contained classes to inclusive classes. Implications for policy development is also discussed.

Implications for Theory

In examining Figure 1, from stage one to stage five, connections can be made to critical disability theory. According to a charity-based model of inclusion, educators express a moral obligation to help students with exceptionalities be a part of their classes. The focus is on the difference or the need and programming surrounds fixing or helping the student to fit in with the current program (Burghart, 2011; Clapton & Fitzgerald, 1997; Lawson, 2006; Quinn, 2009). Educators who are at stage one of the continuum hold a charity-based beliefs system about inclusion. They recognize that inclusion is happening in their schools and they express a desire to include students in their classes. If they are supported, reflect on their current programs, think about how they will include students with exceptionalities in their classes, and have positive experiences including students, their perceptions may be altered and they may move to stage two. Most

teachers beginning to engage in inclusive practice recognize that their current practice and programming needs to change in order to meet the needs of diverse learners (Forlin, 2001; Reiser and Secretariat, 2012). If educators are not supported and continue to hold ‘pathognomonic’ beliefs, the belief that they need to change the child with exceptionalities in order for inclusion to be successful, they will remain at stage one (Jordan et al., 2010).

Educators at stage two and three of the continuum hold beliefs about disability that are rooted in rights-based ideologies. While at stage two, educators come to think more critically about their role in creating inclusive classrooms. They develop an understanding that systemic barriers exist that prevent students with exceptionalities from accessing education (Harpur, 2012). By adjusting their teaching, they can provide more accessible learning opportunities for students with exceptionalities. Educators move from stage two to stage three when they begin to adjust their instructional methods with the learning needs of the students with exceptionalities in mind. Their focus is on what they are doing to make their classrooms inclusive. Educators at this stage engage in professional development, professional reading and collaborating with other teachers and professionals about creating inclusive classrooms (Forlin, 2001; Porter, 2010; Vaughn & Schrumm, 1995).

When educators move to stage four, they experience the greatest shift. At this stage, they begin to recognize the pieces that are key to inclusive practice; students developing a sense of belonging and social capital (Bennett, 2009; Porter, 2010; Reiser & Secretariat, 2012). It is at this stage where educators recognize that their change process is more about what is happening to the students in their classes and less about what they

themselves are doing. Educators can balance their autonomy and community and become active change agents within their schools (Pyhältö et al., 2012).

At stage five educators hold a very critical lens with regards to individuals with exceptionalities within and outside of their school buildings. They often engage in critical conversations with others about rights and inclusion of people with exceptionalities. These educators will be leaders (as teachers or administrators) in educational transformation to inclusive practices within their schools and communities. As in critical theory, they have developed a critical reflective knowledge where they recognize what is wrong, who can change it and what kind of change is needed (Horkheimer, 1972).

The *Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change* provides a framework for examining how theory contributes to the development and overall change of educators working to develop inclusive classroom environments for their students. As they move through the five stages and indirectly consider a charity-based model and a rights-based model of inclusion embedded in critical disability theory, their perceptions and pedagogy shift to a point of transformation. This continuum can provide support for educators with a similar experience to aid them in engaging in reflective practice around inclusive education. It can also identify support necessary to assist educators at various stages on the continuum as further discussed in the implications for practice section that follows.

Implications for Practice

The findings support literature which identifies that appropriate training and professional development are essential for creating and sustaining inclusive classrooms (Bennett, 2009; Forlin, 2001; Porter, 2014; Vaughn & Schrumm, 1995). However, these

findings indicate that despite having special education training and experience the educators identified that even though the teaching of students with exceptionalities was not particularly difficult for them in inclusive classrooms, the greatest challenge remained- figuring out how to meet the learning needs of all the students in the class. This notion was evident in the findings from all three data collection methods. Teachers indicated a lack preparedness for the inclusive classroom and described a gap in their knowledge when it came to developing inclusive curriculum. For these reasons, assumptions cannot be made regarding the preparedness of teachers for inclusive classes regardless of their previous teaching experience and training.

Considering the findings of Male (2011) and Leyser et al. (2011) that engaging in training on exceptionalities contributes to an overall shift in attitudes toward inclusion, providing educators with opportunities to learn and collaborate in a constructive way can help to facilitate attitudinal change about creating inclusive classrooms. The teachers in this study identified the opportunity to collaborate with other educators working to create inclusive classrooms would be beneficial. Several teachers recommended having a Professional Learning Community (PLC), initiated by the school board as a form of professional development, would be beneficial for themselves as well as for others. This PLC would serve to provide teachers with the opportunity to collaborate and share best practices and build capacity around inclusive classrooms, inclusive practices and inclusive curriculum. Another suggestion given was to pair former self-contained class teachers with regular class teachers teaching similar grades. Teachers would have the opportunity to collaborate and share best practices for both students with and without exceptionalities.

The educators in this study identified a relationship they were able to develop with the students and families in their self-contained classes. They referred to a level of caring for the students that allowed them to recognize the abilities of the students in a deeper way than their colleagues at the time. These educators further indicated that they felt this understanding and appreciation of the abilities of students with exceptionalities helped them when they were teaching in inclusive classrooms, in that they held high expectations for their students with exceptionalities. Research indicates that teachers who hold more favorable attitudes towards students with exceptionalities are more enthusiastic about inclusion (Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Kgothule & Hay, 2013; Male, 2011). Although this was not the area of focus for this research, questions for future research is suggested: How does the care that a self-contained special education teacher have for their students impact their ability to create inclusive classrooms? How does care impact educators level of commitment to make inclusion work for their students with exceptionalities to be successful?

Teachers with special education training and experience in this study indicated that they felt they had more confidence than their colleagues when it came to implementing inclusion. This is important for programming and staff development in that these teachers in particular have had experiences as well as training and thus have higher expectations for students with exceptionalities. They described their opportunity to teach in a self-contained class as a ‘privilege’ with the learning and professional growth they attained from this experience. With the decrease in self-contained classes within their school board, they recognized this part of their career as important in their work in inclusive classrooms. Despite the curriculum and support related challenges and

their personal apprehensions, they identified having a better understanding of the child's full capacity when developing inclusive academic programming. Since research indicates that one of the key ways to promote inclusive pedagogy is for educators to have authentic and positive experiences with inclusion (Evans, 1996; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009), this finding from the current study is important when staffing classrooms where students with exceptionalities are first included. If teachers have confidence and a well-developed understanding of important aspects of teaching students with exceptionalities, such as the teachers in this study, they may be better equipped to demonstrate successful inclusion. In order to maximize the success of inclusion and provide a model for other educators to witness, educators with self-contained class experience are actually a unique asset for the implementation and sustainability of inclusion in schools.

Many of the teachers noticed that there was a significant impact of the inclusive classroom on students without exceptionalities in their classes. This finding was apparent in all three of the data collection methods and was identified as an important factor in the change process of the teachers. When the teachers witnessed the positive effects of including students with exceptionalities on the other students in the class, the work they were doing was affirmed and they could see the bigger picture. Developing a class culture that accepts and respects each member and supports their individual learning, had powerful implications for these teachers and their classes. Students' perceptions of difference and belonging changed, they were responsible for each other, and inclusion became regular, normal practice in their classrooms and schools. Developing opportunities for students to be inclusive citizens has powerful implications. Creating a generation of inclusive adults would reform the disability rights movement. Further

research in this area, specifically to consider the impact that inclusion has on all students from their personal perspectives is needed to understand this phenomenon. Also, longitudinal data collected on future outcomes and attitudes for students with and without exceptionalities from inclusive classes would further support the plight for genuine fully inclusive school environments and communities.

The Dimensions of Research and Policy

When we consider how Ministry and school board policy impacts inclusive education, Allan's (2012) summary of some of the concerns regarding inclusion is helpful. Despite a commitment to inclusive practice, in its capacity, the education system, including educators, face challenges when it comes to delivering inclusion. Allan (2012) posits that the competing policy demands of boards and the challenges regarding delivery are not always aligned. In Ontario, Ministry of Education (MOE) documents some of which include, *Bill 82* (1980), *Learning for All* (2013), *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2014), and more recently *Including Students with Special Educational Needs in French as a Second Language* (2015) and *Everyone is Welcome: Inclusion in the Early Years* (2015), as well as school board special education policies, demonstrate ways in which the province is committed to inclusive education. However, due to the top down nature of the education system, many challenges arise in the implementation of these documents. These challenges can be directly related to attitudinal factors regarding including students with exceptionalities and, also priority of, and effective methods for change.

Since attitudes and perceptions are so deeply rooted in one's life experience, these same attitudes and perceptions guide our practice (Minow, 1991). When a school board

or school leader believes children with exceptionalities should be educated in separate classes, then regardless of the beliefs of educators, that board will maintain a segregated model of service delivery. This is one reason why across the province we do not have one standard for educating students with exceptionalities. Similarly, if a school administrator holds favourable attitudes towards inclusion, they will be more likely to support and encourage educators to implement inclusive practice.

Aligned with what Causton-Theoharis and Theoharis (2008) discuss about the important role of administrator vision and support for teacher change and overall school reform, when superintendents are committed to inclusion, they will invest the necessary resources and supports in order to facilitate change. This is exemplified by several school boards across the province that have created inclusive school, namely the school board involved in this study. Using the *Learning for All* document as a framework and not without hard work and challenges, this school board has transformed all members in the school community in some way.

With a superintendent and director of education committed to inclusive education, transformation has occurred at deep levels within the school board. All educators have been impacted by the shift in service delivery in creating inclusive classroom and schools. The outcome has been immense. Educators have been challenged to reconsider their embedded views, beliefs and practices about educating students with exceptionalities. Students with exceptionalities have received opportunities to experience success both academically and socially alongside their peers in 'regular' classrooms. Furthermore, the peers have developed skills for collaboration, compassion and understanding, identified by their teachers as outside of the traditional scope of the

curriculum. As documented by this research, former special education teachers have experienced shifts in their own pedagogy and new ideas about what is important for all students to learn while at school, including the sense of community and belonging.

In considering this exemplar of an inclusive school board, the position of board leaders is crucial for shifting perception and practice at this caliber. Despite MOE documents designed to support educators for inclusive education, it is ultimately the school board level policy along with the attitudes of teachers, that will have the greatest impact on the success of inclusion.

Conclusions

Through a collection of educator voices about their experiences teaching self-contained classes and inclusive classes the following questions were answered: What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes? And, how has this change in classroom placement impacted their attitudes and perceptions about students with exceptionalities and inclusive practices?

Educators' accounts provide insight into the challenges and successes they experienced while formerly teaching self-contained classes and currently teaching inclusive classes. Five themes emerged that were consistent from each measure, the survey, focus group and interview, which all related to inclusive teaching and schools. These five themes included teaching practice, support and training, attitudes and perceptions, inclusive practice, and growth and change. From the responses provided in this research study, it is evident that these educators were committed to providing successful learning opportunities for their students whether in a self-contained class or an

inclusive class. These educators all identified moments where their thoughts about segregating students with exceptionalities shifted from that of a positive environment to questioning segregated philosophy and thinking that there must be a better alternative. As they answered specific questions about their teaching practice and personal beliefs and describe various experiences over the course of their teaching careers, their change process became evident. They all identified a pivotal moment or series of moments where they recognized their own growth and change in relation to personal attitudes and perceptions and also how they interpreted the attitudes and perceptions of colleagues (Forlin et al., 2009; Sharma et al., 2011).

The teachers discussed experiences with inclusion both positive and negative that influenced their perceptions about teaching students with exceptionalities. Support and training were identified as factors that contributed to their understanding about effectively programming for and teaching students with exceptionalities (Leyser et al., 2011; Male 2011). As well, the educators felt that assumptions were made about their ability to successfully create inclusive classrooms. Finally, as a result of their experiences with inclusion and their personal growth and change, the teaching practice of these educators shifted, sometimes quite drastically, in order to create inclusive classrooms (Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Phyhalto et al., 2012).

Through examining the accounts of the educators and creating the phenomenological description, a visual representation for considering educator change process as it relates to inclusive practice was subsequently developed. This continuum, based on a synthesis and implementation of the information gathered from the participants, can serve as a guide to help educators understand the complex process of

pedagogical change in relation to inclusion. Many constructed beliefs held about disability and special education are rooted in historical understandings of disability which are often unconscious to an individual. What we believe in on the surface can look different from situation to situation as we adapt in our environments (Carrington, 1999). Until we, as educators, are challenged to consider why we hold certain beliefs about disability, the way we think about disability will remain unchanged. This research concludes that when educators with special educational experience are challenged to consider their beliefs about educating students with exceptionalities, combined with opportunities to experience positive inclusion, a shift occurs and their pedagogy adjusts and subsequently aligns with that of a rights-based framework rooted in critical disability theory.

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Appendix A

Educators Survey Questions- using excel online survey form- Modified from Educator Inclusion Survey (Bennett, Gallagher, Somma, Wlodarczyk, 2014)

1. In an inclusive class, I anticipated that dealing with students with special needs would be challenging.
2. I feel prepared to work in an inclusive setting
3. I am confident in my ability to work with students with exceptionalities in an inclusive classroom setting
4. I am more knowledgeable about differentiating curriculum
5. My view of inclusion has become more positive
6. I am more confident in my ability to support inclusion next year
7. Teaching in an inclusive setting has increased my workload
8. Students with exceptionalities in my class have shown academic growth
9. Students with exceptionalities in my class have shown social growth
10. It would be beneficial if I had more opportunity to collaborate with other teachers
11. Support from administration is an essential part of successful inclusive practice
12. Access to on-going PD would be beneficial; to supporting inclusive practice
13. Inclusive practice requires more planning time
14. Support from an inclusion coach has been helpful in creating successful inclusive practice
15. The students in my class have been positively affected socially by the inclusion of children with special needs
16. The students in my class have been positively affected academically by the inclusion of children with special needs
17. A service delivery model that focuses on inclusive practice provides more opportunity for students with special needs to achieve academically
18. A service delivery model that focuses on inclusive practice provides more opportunity for students with special needs to achieve socially
19. From my observation, students without exceptionalities are more engaged academically.
20. From my observations, students without exceptionalities are more engaged socially.
21. Prior to this experience I would have said that I was a strong supporter of inclusion
22. My view of inclusion has become more positive
23. Personal relationships (e.g. family members) with exceptionalities has had a positive impact on my attitude towards inclusive practice

Demographics

24. Please indicate your division
25. Please indicate the number of years of experience you have
26. How long did you teach in self-contained class settings?

Rating scale

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Yes very much

Appendix B

A Special Education Teacher Focus Group Prompts

1. Describe your current role in the education system.
2. Describe a salient experience including students with exceptionalities in your classroom. (positive or negative). Something that resonates with you.
3. If someone asked you “what does inclusion looks like in a classroom, or a school?”, what would you tell them?
4. Imagine a school where there was unlimited time and resources including personnel and money to support students, what would this school look like as far as service delivery?
5. In your experience as a professional, how do people change or shift their thinking when it comes to teaching practice? What have you observed in your experiences?
6. Think back to your beliefs and teaching practice when you were teaching the SCC. Describe how your beliefs and practice influenced your role then compared to now
7. Describe if and when you identify a moment or moments when you began to shift your thinking. Can you describe what contributed to this moment being instrumental in your growth?
8. As educators who have had this experience of teaching SCC and now inclusive classes, how do you think teachers should be supported, trained, etc. for inclusive education? What factors do you feel are essential?

Appendix C

Special Education Teacher Interview Prompts

1. Can you please describe in as much detail as possible your experience with including students with exceptionalities in regular classes?
2. Think back to the time you first found out you would be making a transition from teaching a self-contained class to teaching an inclusive class. At that time did you feel prepared for this change?
3. What resources, training, support was in place?
4. Think back to your view on inclusion prior to this change in class placement. Please describe your view of inclusion at that time.
 - b. Has your view on inclusion changed? If yes, can you identify how?
 - c. Can you describe a 'turning point' when you began to notice that your views were changing? If no, please explain why you believe your view remains the same.
5. Given your former experience in special education, how do you think this experience has influenced your perceptions/beliefs both within your role as an educator inside and outside of the classroom.
6. If given the opportunity would you go back into a contained class program? Please explain why or why not.

Appendix D

REB Clearance Letter



Brock University
Research Ethics Office
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: April 2, 2015

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: BENNETT, Sheila - Teacher Education

CO-INVESTIGATOR: Tiffany Gallagher

FILE: 13-042 - BENNETT

TYPE: Ph. D./Faculty STUDENT: Monique Somma and Kathy Włodarczyk
SUPERVISOR: Sheila Bennett

TITLE: A School Board's Transition to Inclusion

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: MODIFICATION

Expiry Date: 10/30/2015

The Brock University Social Sciences Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement.

Modification:

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before **10/30/2015**. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at <http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms>.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

- a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;
- c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;
- d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

Jan Frijters, Chair
Social Sciences Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.